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Local Heroics: Scottish cinema in the 1990s

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A thesis submitted for examination for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Departments of Scottish History and Theatre, Film & Television Studies

April 2006

For my beloved father, James Patrick (Jim) Murray (1946 - 2003)
My friend and first teacher

Abstract

This thesis surveys Scottish cinema during the 1990s. It takes as its starting point the fact that this period witnessed easily the highest and most consistent levels of indigenous feature film production in the history of Scottish film culture. By the end of the 1990s, many observers proposed that it was for the first time possible to talk about the existence of a 'Scottish cinema' and/or a 'Scottish film industry', where before only occasional Scottish films and/or Scottish filmmakers could be discerned. This thesis argues that the most important precipitant of Scottish cinema's unprecedented 1990s industrial expansion involved local filmmakers' pre-meditated, industrially aspirant adaptation of American cinematic precedents and working practices. The nature of this 'adaptation' was two-fold. On one hand, it was institutional, relating to the reformation and creation of the kind of financial, training and plant infrastructures which make feature production possible. On the other, it was creative, relating to the generic and aesthetic influences and reference points preferred by many 1990s Scottish filmmakers. This thesis presents the trajectory of the American agenda which dominated 1990s Scottish cinema within a 'Rise and Fall' paradigm. It proposes that the first half of the decade witnessed predominantly progressive local engagements, both industrially and ideologically speaking, with American film industrial and cultural practices. The latter part of the 1990s, however, was characterised by regressive misinterpretations of earlier, beneficial transatlantic appropriations. By the end of the decade, two things were clear about Scottish cinema's 1990s American agenda. Firstly, over the period in question, that agenda had either created or consolidated many previously lacking material conditions necessary for a sustainable national cinema. Secondly, that agenda had largely exhausted itself as a convincing blueprint for the further development of Scottish cinema in the early twenty-first century.

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JM
Edinburgh
April 3rd 2006

Introduction: A Big Tease? 1990s Scottish cinema and the lure of America

This thesis establishes and interrogates the defining institutional, aesthetic and representational characteristics of 1990s Scottish cinema. The most immediately salient observation that needs made of my object of study is that, over the period in question, it expanded in an unprecedented, locally unlooked- and unhelped-for fashion. By 2000, Scottish cinema was materially 'there' in the eyes of interested parties, to a degree that it had not been less than ten years previous. In 1993, for example, the HMSO *Charter for the Arts in Scotland* could apprehend only "a massive hole at the centre of the [local] industry where feature film production should be"¹. Yet as the 1990s progressed, Scottish cinema's novel, domestically and internationally felt presence became increasingly manifest. This was so in terms of escalating levels of indigenous filmmaking, local infrastructural maturation and expansion, growing amounts of mobile film productions and capital locating to Scotland. Such developments in turn precipitated the much-enhanced critical profile of cinema as an important constituent part of contemporary Scottish cultural production. Indeed, by the early '00s, some commentators had begun to argue that the nation's film and television cultures were now, despite their relative infancy, and alongside the far better-established and studied Scottish novel, "the primary media" through which "the myths and realities, experiences and dreams of Scotland and its inhabitants have been reflected and asserted, imagined and re-imagined"² for the benefit of local and international audiences.

Accordingly, the central aim of this work is to consider both why and how Scottish cinema's striking material consolidation, and its attendant, deepening symbolic resonance, from 'massive hole' in to something like cornerstone of contemporary Scottish culture, came to pass during the last decade of the twentieth century. I therefore prioritise close examination of the evolving institutional and industrial conditions which facilitated the belated entry of a distinctive, indigenously produced Scottish cinema into wider European and Anglophone arenas. In doing so, this work accedes to Albert

¹ HMSO, *The Charter for the Arts in Scotland* (Edinburgh: HMSO, 1993), pg. 29. My insert.

² Duncan Petrie, *Contemporary Scottish Fictions: Film, Television and the Novel* (Edinburgh: EUP, 2004), pp. 1-2.

Moran's dictum that, "it is worth remembering that the material existence of a film is a prior, necessary condition to its capacity to engender any ideological effects"³. However, this does not represent a Gradgrindian form of crude economic determinism. As Nick Roddick notes, devoting intellectual energy to "arguing that film is not an art-form created by an individual in a garret but is manufactured by a capital-intensive industrial system" should remain a very different matter from concluding, "it is *only* that".⁴ Dissecting 1990s Scottish institutional interventions, and their undoubted success in creating a far broader, more variegated local production base than ever before, neither pre-empts nor supplants the need for alternative critical approaches related to textual analysis and reception study of particular films and their national representational content. Institutional developments are particularly important to understand because they successfully precipitated a vertiginous rise in indigenous production, funding and training activities - a critical mass with regards to which the latter methodologies could be fruitfully cultivated; in other words, the material and epistemological conditions Tom O'Regan argues are necessary "for a national cinema to function", namely that, "it must become an object of knowledge. It must be put into discourse"⁵ through theoretically engaged commentary, definition and debate. It would be perverse, indeed impossible, to make post-1990 Scottish films and filmmakers properly critical 'objects of knowledge' without a contextualising investigation of the material reasons why the former became publicly circulating (and quickly multiplying) 'objects', in the first place.

Whatever their other divergences and disagreements, seminal academic commentaries on '90s Scottish cinema are united on this central contention. In 1990, John Caughie argued in oracular fashion that,

The new questions for representing Scotland in the nineties... are not simply critical and theoretical... but are also material and practical questions of the structures from which new forms [of

³ Albert Moran, 'Terms for a Reader: Film, Hollywood, national cinema, cultural identity and film policy', in Moran (ed.), *Film Policy: International, National and Regional Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 1996), pg. 1.

⁴ Nick Roddick, 'Show me the culture!', in *Sight & Sound*, Vol. 8. 12 (Dec 1998), pg. 24.

⁵ Tom O'Regan, *Australian National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1996), pg. 27.

Scottish filmmaking] and discourses [of local identities constructed and disseminated within the former] will emerge.⁶

In 2000, retrospectively surveying, rather than anticipating, the developments of the '90s, Duncan Petrie contended in broadly congruent terms that,

The necessary conditions for a sustainable national cinema require more than the existence of a handful of films. What is needed are certain structures and institutions that can enable films to be produced in a relatively consistent and regular basis.⁷

As Caughie states and Petrie implies, what went for a 'sustainable national cinema' in 1990s Scotland also necessarily applies to a 'sustainable national cinema criticism' made in and of that time and place. While there exists a wide variety of ways in which a 'national cinema' can be productively defined in different contexts, from a web of domestic audience consumption patterns to a canonical body of films that become part of an officially sanctioned history of national cultural production and identity⁸, the present study proposes the paramount importance of an "institutional conception of national cinema"⁹ in any discussion of post-1990 Scottish film culture. As Colin McArthur cautioned early in the decade, painfully constrained is "the extent to which one can conduct an argument about Scottish culture without discussing the institutions of that culture".¹⁰ Certainly, Moran's strategically simplified 'industry *then* ideology' prescription should not be reified into a universal itinerary for the exploration of all local and national film cultures. However, the central historical fact of an especially

⁶ John Caughie, 'Representing Scotland: New Questions for Scottish Cinema', in Eddie Dick (ed.), *From Limelight to Satellite: A Scottish Film Book* (London/Glasgow: BFI/SFC, 1990), pg. 30. My inserts.

⁷ Duncan Petrie, 'The New Scottish Cinema', in Mette Hjort & Scott Mackenzie (eds.), *Cinema and Nation* (London: Routledge, 2000), pg. 154.

⁸ The best-known taxonomies of 'national cinema' are those set out by Steven Crofts and Andrew Higson: Crofts, 'Reconceptualizing National Cinema/s', in *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, Vol. 14. 3 (1993), pp. 49-67; Crofts, 'Concepts of national cinema', in John Hill & Pamela Church Gibson (eds.), *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies* (Oxford: OUP, 1998), pp. 385-394; Higson, 'The Concept of National Cinema', in *Screen*, Vol. 30. 4 (Autumn 1989), pp. 36-46.

⁹ Petrie, 'New Scottish Cinema' op. cit., pg. 154.

¹⁰ Colin McArthur, 'Scottish Culture: A reply to David McCrone', in *Scottish Affairs*, n. 4 (Summer 1993), pg. 100.

underdeveloped industrial infrastructure bedeviling successive attempts to create a viable Scottish cinema throughout the twentieth century makes his ordering of priorities fit for application to the case of Scotland after 1990.

This introduction therefore splits into three sections, which might be labeled, 'emergence', 'explanation' and 'exegesis'. The first of these briefly substantiates the contention of Scottish cinema's remarkably rapid expansion during the 1990s. The second then introduces the main text's proposed understanding of the precise nature of the institutional and individual creative interventions through which such local success was collectively achieved. Building on this, the third and final section illustrates how this work as a whole shall approach the resultant, unprecedentedly large corpus of post-1990 Scottish films in an ideologically driven project of textual analysis, one preoccupied with hegemonic ways in which these features construct national identity, history and society for audiences. Or, as O'Regan would have it, this dissertation ultimately seeks to survey the post-1990 industrial and institutional terrain in a largely empiricist fashion not as an end in itself, but rather because this forms an essential critical 'base camp' from which to map contemporary Scottish cinema 'into discourse'.

1990s Scottish cinema: emergence

In the post-*Trainspotting* (Danny Boyle, GB, 1996) era, it is useful to emphasise (indeed, remember) that the question most routinely posed of Scottish cinema by critics and filmmakers alike during the early '90s was whether or not it actually existed, or could ever exist, in any significantly quantifiable form whatsoever. As the filmmaker Murray Grigor complained in 1990,

Scotland has its writers, its filmmakers and its first-rate technicians [but] if film-making were an industry [here] it would have investors and a proper production structure... without

these... [there will be no more than] an occasional blip as a new talent takes a bow before heading for more rewarding territory.¹¹

In 1992, two academic critics glumly echoed that prognosis: was it “really possible to look forward to the growth of a national cinema when the number of indigenous films produced... in the last five years has averaged just under two a year?”¹² Yet by the end of the '90s, academic and industrial observers seemed broadly united in their conviction that the fundamental anxieties typically aired at the decade's outset had been definitively assuaged. For example, in 1995, the trade press commentator Allan Hunter, despite the contemporary local euphoria then surrounding the unfolding domestic and international box office successes of *Shallow Grave* (Danny Boyle, GB), still felt compelled to emphasise the historical fact of Scottish film culture's historic inability to generate a self-sustaining infrastructural carapace, and the consequent “feast-or-famine cycle that has previously characterised feature film production in Scotland”¹³. Yet as soon after as 1999, the year that two Scottish debut features, *Ratcatcher* (Lynne Ramsay, GB/Fr) and *Orphans* (Peter Mullan, GB), saw their respective writer/directors internationally acclaimed as important new *auteurist* voices within European cinema, the same writer felt able to allow that such individual successes were emerging precisely *because* of the existence of a substantive local infrastructure, rather than *despite* its historic, and still-ongoing, absence. In the few years since 1995, Scottish cinema had, for Hunter, somehow managed to achieve something approaching industrial viability and creative critical mass, supporting “significant activity at all levels of the industry, from art college novices to some of the country's most experienced names”.¹⁴ Contemporaneous academic voices concurred. Duncan Petrie ended his 2000 monograph *Screening Scotland* proclaiming that, “it is clear that Scottish film-making is entering the new millennium with

¹¹ Murray Grigor, ‘A good risk for those who want to buy a piece of the action’, in *The Scotsman*, (12/5/90), pg. 9. My inserts.

¹² Peter Meech & Richard Kilborn, ‘Media and identity in a stateless nation: the case of Scotland’, in *Media, Culture & Society*, Vol. 14. 2 (1992), pg. 257. The features in question were: *Heavenly Pursuits* (Charles Gormley, GB, 1987), *Venus Peter* (Ian Sellar, GB, 1989), *Play Me Something* (Timothy Neat & John Berger, GB, 1989), *Silent Screem* (David Hayman, GB, 1990) and *Conquest of the South Pole* (Gillies Mackinnon, GB, 1990).

¹³ Allan Hunter, ‘Plaid Influence’, in *Screen International*, n. 1020 (11/8/95), pg. 12.

¹⁴ Allan Hunter, ‘The talk of... Edinburgh’, in *Screen International*, n. 1212 (11/6/99), pg. 7.

unprecedented levels of confidence, achievement and ambition”.¹⁵ Certainly ‘clear’ is the complete reversal in the nature of received perceptions of Scottish cinema’s present and future prospects over the course of the ’90s. A deficit of local confidence and expectation gave way to a surfeit during the period which this work examines.

Bald statistics detailing levels of indigenous film production during the last two decades of the twentieth century support the collective change of heart undergone right at its close. Between 1980 and 1990, 16 features and 6 short projects with significant or majority Scottish creative input, Scottish-specific narrative content and/or domestic funding were produced and subsequently distributed in British cinemas. Between 1990 and 1995, the equivalent figures were 7 and 9. Finally, between 1995 and 2000, quantum acceleration took place, with figures of 18 features and 45 shorts for that half-decade alone. Moreover, the latter set of statistics does not include international film shoots locating to Scotland in the same period, a substantial list including *Braveheart* (Mel Gibson, USA, 1995), *Breaking the Waves* (Lars von Trier, Dk/Swe/Fr/Nl/Nor, 1996) and *Mission Impossible* (Brian De Palma, USA, 1996).¹⁶ In addition, the late ’90s upsurge was consolidated and then escalated yet further during the early ’00s: 5 new Scottish features were shown at both the 2003 and 2004 Edinburgh International Film Festivals alone; indeed, the 27-strong contingent of Scottish features, shorts and documentaries at Edinburgh in the latter year represented easily the most substantial local presence in the Festival’s history.¹⁷

1990s Scottish cinema: explanation

Given that Scottish cinema’s heady 1990s efflorescence was largely unforeseen at the decade’s outset, it cries out for critical explanation as well as empirical documentation. In order to introduce the terms in which I propose to perform this former task, I want now to

¹⁵ Duncan Petrie, *Screening Scotland*, (London: BFI, 2000), pg. 226.

¹⁶ Figures derived from *ibid*, pp. 227-230 and Janet McBain, ‘Scotland in feature film: a filmography’, in Dick (ed.) *op. cit.*, pp. 251-253. The figure of 18 domestically released Scottish features between 1995 and 2000 also includes *Trainspotting* and *Mrs Brown* (John Madden, GB, 1997).

¹⁷ For further details, see Jonathan Murray, ‘Introduction and Users’ notes’, in Murray, *That Thinking Feeling: a Research Guide to Scottish Cinema* (Glasgow/Edinburgh: Scottish Screen/Edinburgh College of Art, 2005), pg. 1.

make some brief remarks about a Scottish-themed, part US-financed film which does not subsequently feature in the main text: *The Big Tease* (Kevin Allen, GB/USA, 1999).

Discussion of this text allows me to flag what I believe were the shared origins and self-conscious aspirations of those institutional and individual creative initiatives and innovations which transformed Scottish cinema's industrial, commercial and critical prospects during the '90s.

The Big Tease, co-written by its lead actor, the Scottish comedian Craig Ferguson, is a comedy in which a gay Glaswegian hairdresser, Crawford Mackenzie, travels to Los Angeles after mistaking a courtesy invitation to spectate at the Hairdressers' Guild of America's annual 'Platinum Scissors' world championships as a request for him to compete. The misunderstanding is a doubly humiliating experience for Crawford. The intensely local boundaries of his totemic status within Glasgow's tonsorial community (which leads him to misread the nature of his American 'invitation' in the first instance) are cruelly exposed once he blunders into the high-powered world of Beverly Hills celebrity crimping. There, he is routinely and scornfully dismissed as a parochial non-entity. In a delirious 'plucky underdog' fantasy, however, Crawford eventually engineers entry to the Platinum Scissors, and is ultimately crowned the world's best hairdresser. He returns to Glasgow a hero. A degree of ironic self-consciousness is foregrounded throughout, via the conceit of framing *The Big Tease*'s utopian fiction as a Nick Broomfield-style documentary anatomisation of celebrity: the film audiences see is purportedly that shot by an English documentarist who accompanies Crawford on his travels, appearing on camera throughout to interrogate his subject.

What makes *The Big Tease* such a representative and indicative product of 1990s Scottish cinema is the film's self-conscious juxtaposition of very local cultures, identities and creative personnel (not simply those of 'Scotland', nor even 'Glasgow', but the self-consciously bohemian milieu of that city's West End) with far more internationally recognised and resonating equivalents, the image of American cinema, popular culture and identity enshrined in the gaudy myth of 'Tinseltown'. This 'culture clash' narrative and comedic formula, not to mention its headily utopian tenor, is entirely symptomatic.

The defining characteristic of 1990s Scottish cinema was local filmmakers' pre-meditated, aspirant, and at first, brazenly self-confident, adaptation of American cinematic precedents and working practices, in a bid to construct an industrially viable, commercially competitive Scottish feature production sector. *The Big Tease*, like many other Scottish films of the period, self-consciously attempts to commodify local characters and cultures by deliberately inserting them into internationally recognizable American equivalents. It is precisely through such strategies that this film proposes that a distinctive, yet widely consumable, version of Scottish national identity (Crawford's over-determined claim to be "representing Scotland" in the fictional Platinum Scissors contest is symptomatic here) and national cinema practice (for which the film itself is a synecdoche) would most propitiously emerge and circulate.

The nature of this 'transatlantic' cinematic adaptation and accommodation self-consciously attempted within 1990s Scotland was two-fold. Firstly, it possessed an institutional and infrastructural component. During the decade, many new or reconstituted local institutions and initiatives were created in order to better attract mobile – especially American – film productions and capital to Scotland. Key examples of this phenomenon, most discussed at length in what follows, include: Scottish Screen Locations (1990), the Glasgow Film Fund (1993), Scottish Screen (1997) and Glasgow District Council's Film Charter (1998). As a result, an unprecedented slew of US studio projects located to Scotland in the period. This process began with *Hamlet* (Franco Zeffirelli, USA/GB/Fr, 1990), and most famously/notoriously encompassed the star of that film, Mel Gibson's, quixotic (some would say proto-fascist¹⁸) take on the early medieval Scottish Wars of Independence, *Braveheart*. Indeed, during the especially frenetic period of 1995-96, when mobile production after mobile production seemed to descend upon the country, it fleetingly appeared to international observers that, in both film industrial and commercial terms, "Scotland is becoming the flavor of the zeitgeist".¹⁹ In one of the mobile projects attracted to Scotland in these two years, *Loch Ness* (John Henderson, USA, 1995), a visiting American scientist aims to (dis)prove the Nessie

¹⁸ See Colin McArthur, *Brigadoon, Braveheart and the Scots: Distortions of Scotland in Hollywood Cinema* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2003), pp. 192-208.

¹⁹ Harlan Kennedy, 'Kiltspotting: Highland Reels', in *Film Comment*, Vol. 32. 4 (Jul/Aug 1996), pg. 29.

legend once and for all, but discovers a ruthlessly efficient local inward investment generation machine standing in his way. As he wryly notes, running lucrative, finely calibrated service sectors for wealthy international clients “seems to be the national pastime”. In the area of film production, such native entrepreneurialism became at very least more than an occasional hobby during the '90s, a process that *Loch Ness* both materially results from and fleetingly glosses.²⁰

In tandem with this systematic attempt to attract more visiting filmmaking, '90s Scotland also witnessed a significant number of institutional innovations and interventions geared more towards the stimulation and support of indigenous production activity, whether through financial subsidy, specialist training, or a combination of the two. Mirroring new inward investment mechanisms' particular consciousness of the American industry's presence and demands, new institutional interventions aiming to nurture domestic filmmaking were often explicitly modelled on pre-existing North American counterparts. Examples of this phenomenon included: the screenwriting workshop *Movie Makars* (1992), the Glasgow Film Fund, the ambitious, pan-European screenwriting and directing laboratory *Moonstone International* (1997) and Glasgow's Film Charter. However, I shall argue that such transatlantic institutional borrowings were not simply industrial and functional in nature and significance; they also impacted directly on both the preferred creative practices employed by filmmakers in '90s Scotland, and the representations of Scottish society and identity that resulted from these. Brief consideration of the example of *Moonstone International* introduces this central point, developed at significantly greater length in chapters 3 and 4.

Moonstone was the brainchild of the pioneering theatre, film and television producer, director and writer John McGrath. In the mid '90s, he viewed a Channel 4 interview with Robert Redford, founder in 1981 of the Sundance Institute, an annual film festival and series of directing and screenwriting workshops for emerging talent in the US, routinely

²⁰ For details on the catalytic creation of Scottish Screen Locations, see Richard Mowe, 'Scottish Screen Locations', in *Scottish Film & Visual Arts* (4th Quarter 1992), pp. 16-17.

credited as the midwife of post-1980 American Independent cinema.²¹ Directly afterwards, McGrath contacted Redford to discuss training needs and challenges encountered within Scottish and Irish film industries. As a result of this initial contact, Redford subsequently agreed that Sundance would provide logistical and mentoring support for a European equivalent established by McGrath, with especial interest in the support of Scottish and Irish filmmakers: “the idea of the project was always agreed between Robert Redford and myself as a combined Scots-Irish initiative”.²² With initial set-up funding from Scotland (Scottish Screen, the Scottish Arts Council), Ireland (Screen Training Ireland) and the European Union (MEDIA), Moonstone International held its inaugural set of screenwriting and directing workshops for twenty selected participants in Connemara during November 1997.²³

McGrath’s initiative was a bold, entirely representative local attempt to systematically inculcate more commercially aware, internationally orientated filmmaking practices in Scotland and Ireland of a kind he believed had not previously existed in either nation. For McGrath, the economics of scale inherent in producing films within nations with populations (and therefore potential domestic audiences) of under 6 million necessarily entailed that, to achieve any kind of industrial sustainability,

You hope to show a film all over the world... [therefore] there’s an element of filmmaking that demands an almost mythological structure... The kind of filmmaking where anybody can see what it is about because it’s generally approachable, but it’s terrifically locked into its own place and specificity.²⁴

²¹ See, for example, Peter Biskind, *Down and Dirty Pictures: Miramax, Sundance and the Rise of Independent Film* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004).

²² John McGrath quoted in Pippa Edge, ‘Redford boosts Scottish film-making’, in *The Scotsman*, (3/4/98), pg. 8.

²³ For further details on Moonstone’s genesis, see Ibid; John Ross, ‘Lights, camera and plenty of action as the Sundance Kid heads for the hills’, in *The Scotsman* (19/9/97), n. pg. ref. (Newsroom electronic press archive); Gavin Docherty, ‘Moonstone spotlight falls on Celtic talents’, in *The Scotsman*, (31/10/97), n. pg. ref. (Newsroom electronic press archive).

²⁴ Quoted in Olga Taxidou, ‘John McGrath: from Cheviots to Silver Darlings’, in Randall Stevenson & Gavin Wallace (eds.), *Scottish Theatre since the ’70s* (Edinburgh: EUP, 1996), pg. 157. My insert.

Indeed, such was McGrath's enthusiasm for what he perceived as Sundance's unalloyed success in nurturing and promoting successive generations of original but exportable young American filmmakers ("nearly all the good independent movies have come through Sundance"²⁵), that the Institute itself became something of a 'mythological structure'. It underwrote his fervent belief that transplantation of this particular American model could definitively transform the prospects of Scottish and Irish cinemas:

A lot of people in Scotland and Ireland are cut off from mainstream filmmaking. I wouldn't say they were parochial, but I do think there is an international dimension to filmmaking that can be studied. This process has worked in the US with Sundance because it has been a way to make independent cinema commercial... human-sized movies for an international audience.²⁶

McGrath's rhetoric is revealing because it demonstrates in action a typical '90s belief that transplantation to Scotland of American *institutional structures* also entailed a concomitant importation and adoption of *creative practices* hailing from the same national culture. In McGrath's ideal scenario, Scottish cinema's acquisition of an US-originated 'international dimension' would allow individual movies to remain 'locked into their own place' of geographical and cultural origin, because the stories, identities and experiences they narrated would always carefully be rendered legible for, and therefore marketable to, audiences beyond Scotland's borders.

It is in this precise sense that 1990s Scottish cinema's mimetic relationship with American cinematic precedent needs to be characterised as 'two-fold'. US filmic influences and dictates proved as dominant in the recurrent generic, aesthetic and narrative devices deployed by local filmmakers of the period, as they were for the new institutional structures through which those individuals were better enabled to make films

²⁵ Quoted in Brian Pendreigh, 'In step with Sundance', in *The Sunday Times*, (12/4/98), n. pg. ref. (Newsroom electronic press archive).

²⁶ Quoted in Allan Hunter, 'Regeneration', in *Screen International*, n. 1120 (8/8/97), pg. 17.

in the first place. Key filmmaking and institutional protagonists alike enthusiastically prosecuted a self-conscious collective attempt to produce indigenous films with the potential to prove commercially attractive in international image markets.

The most resonant and influential instances of local filmmakers patenting the hegemonic '90s model of the 'Scots-American' film are to be found in the catalytic successes of 1995, *Shallow Grave*—the most profitable domestic film at the British box office that year—and *Rob Roy* (Michael Caton-Jones, USA/GB)—the most expensive feature project successfully developed to date by Scottish creative personnel.

These two films are particularly significant because they entrenched the two specific kinds of Scottish creative borrowing most recurrently made during the '90s from the huge available range of American filmmaking practices past and present. The makers of *Shallow Grave*, as with the example of *Moonstone* and *McGrath*, looked to import narrative, aesthetic and commercial strategies associated with late '80s/early '90s American Independent cinema in their attempt to create a locally specific, yet internationally marketable Scottish film. As the film's producer, Andrew Macdonald, noted seven years after its domestic release,

When we were making *Shallow Grave*, people used to say, 'what are you trying to make it like?' in terms of British films, and there was very little else around that was similar. We based it on American Independent films: *sex, lies and videotape* [Steven Soderburgh, USA, 1989], and obviously the Coen Brothers' work, Spike Lee's work, and that was sort of what we hoped was reasonably smart but also entertaining, commercial, accessible for people to see. And I don't think anybody in Britain, British filmmakers, the famous filmmakers, good filmmakers though they were, like Derek Jarman, really cared about a broader audience... We cared about that and we tried to make a story that people would be interested to come and see and also that would

have some relevance to their lives because it was set in a place that they recognised, rather than San Francisco.²⁷

By contrast, the makers of *Rob Roy*, specifically, producer Peter Broughan and screenwriter Alan Sharp, deliberately resuscitated Classical Hollywood genre, in their particular case, the Western. This became a generic and, in McGrath's terminology, 'mythological' structure within which to simultaneously narrate and commodify, certain key Scottish historical personages and events, Robert Roy MacGregor and the immediate prelude to the 1715 Jacobite Rebellion. As with the ostensibly very different *Shallow Grave*, *Rob Roy*'s makers thus envisaged making an at once locally specific, yet internationally marketable, Scottish film, as the latter film's producer, Peter Broughan, put matters, "tak[ing] on a historical subject... a complicated political time... [and] compress[ing] all of this Rob Roy stuff into a two-hour screenplay."²⁸

These two specific local borrowings, from 1980s/90s American Independent cinema and Classical Hollywood genre, and their unprecedented domestic and international commercial success, in turn structured a very significant amount of post '95 indigenous feature production. Together, they created a 1990s Scottish cinema centrally characterised by parallel strands of 'Scottish independent' and 'Scottish classical genre' cinema. While by no means all 1990s Scottish films conform to these broad categorisations, together they constitute easily the most numerically significant collective movement within the country's cinema of the period. Other 'Scottish Independent' movies of the '90s were: *Soft Top*, *Hard Shoulder* (Stefan Schwartz, GB, 1992), *Trainspotting*, *The Life of Stuff* (Simon Donald, GB, 1997), *The Acid House* (Paul McGuigan, GB, 1998), *Beautiful Creatures* (Bill Eagles, GB, 2000) and *Late Night Shopping* (Saul Metzstein, GB/Ger, 2001). Scottish variations upon Classical Hollywood genres were: *The Near Room* (David Hayman, GB, 1995), *The Slab Boys* (John Byrne, GB, 1997), *The Debt Collector* (Anthony Neilson, GB, 1999), *Strictly Sinatra* (Peter

²⁷ Macdonald interviewed for part 2 of the author's 6x30min radio documentary series on Scottish cinema, *Scotch Reels*, tx. BBC Radio Scotland, (9/7/02).

²⁸ Quoted in Angus Finney, 'Rob Roy: Case Study No. 3', in Finney, *The State of European Cinema: A new dose of reality* (London: Cassell, 1996), pg. 201.

Capaldi, GB/USA, 2001) and *The Magdalene Sisters* (Peter Mullan, GB/Ire, 2001). All these films are discussed to a greater or lesser degree in the main text. With regards to Duncan Petrie's contention that the 1990s witnessed the birth of a "devolved"²⁹ Scottish cinema, I shall therefore argue throughout that this cinema was as much an 'American' as it was a 'British' one.

Rob Roy also usefully illustrates another aspect of, and explanation here proposed for, the remarkable pervasion of American cinematic influences and reference points within 1990s Scottish cinema. Crucially, the generic and mythological framing structure of this film appears to have been driven not simply by the nuanced entrepreneurial calculations of a few individuals active within the rarified confines of the Scottish filmmaking community. Peter Broughan, for example, has stated that the construction of *Rob Roy* as a 'tartan western' is also explicable in terms of an intensely felt interpellation by American popular culture on the part of key creative personnel, one he understood to be as nationally representative as it was subjectively acute:

I think most Scots... young or old have this really intense relationship with American culture, whether it's music or movies or both. It was certainly both in my case, and I'm not unusual in that respect... I've been influenced in my own work by Orson Welles. I've been influenced in my own work by Martin Scorsese. I've been influenced in my own work by Howard Hawks, by Alfred Hitchcock, who was British, of course, but effectively 'American', in that the majority of his creative life was spent in America. Billy Wilder – it's really a list of American or American-located greats. It's not an original list because they're the same heroes, the same icons that a lot of people have got.³⁰

²⁹ Petrie, *Screening...* op. cit., pg. 186.

³⁰ Interviewed for and quoted from part 2 of the author's *Scotch Reels*, op. cit.

Indeed, Broughan here closely echoed the depiction of local cultural allegiances sketched by *Rob Roy*'s screenwriter, Alan Sharp, nearly four decades previously, in the latter's autobiographical novel *A Green Tree in Gedde* (1965). Very close to that book's outset, in Greenock town centre, Moseby, the narrative's central protagonist,

... was confronted by a tiled bathroom and a toilet in the window of a builder's showroom. It was where the Central Picture Hall used to be. They called it the Ranch because all the Hopalong Cassidys used to come there. A plumber's emporium. He felt genuine sadness at time and things changing... It was always warm to go through the glass doors... and go up the steps to where somebody tore your tickets in half and the sounds of the guns making that noise that didn't look like 'ricochet' when he looked it up and inside they were riding through that well-known country with the rocks and the trees and the music was going 'dan de dan'.³¹

Yet while many 'things change', the 'well-known country' of American cinema and popular culture proffered to and consensually inhabited by many Scots was regularly evoked, celebrated and reconstructed within national cultural production prior to the 1990s. For examples of this, one need look no further than the seminal late '80s television drama work of John Byrne. 1950s Rock & Roll and Country & Western suffuse the native diegeses and *mentalités* of *Tutti Frutti* (BBC, 1987) and *Your Cheatin' Heart* (BBC, 1990) respectively—the latter produced by Broughan.³² This local fascination with cultural Americana is self-consciously present too in *The Big Tease*. Crawford gazes over the Los Angeles skyline at night, musing that 'here' is 'where stories are'. Indeed, this film's central 'story' is set 'there', renarrating as it does the 'coming to America' myth of the successful immigrant. The ubiquitous presence of American popular culture within the Scottish sphere both predates the 1990s and

³¹ Alan Sharp, *A Green Tree in Gedde* (repr. Glasgow: Richard Drew Publishing, 1985), pg. 14.

³² See the published novelisation of the former and shooting script of the latter: John Byrne, *Tutti Frutti* (London: BBC Books, 1987); Byrne, *Your Cheatin' Heart* (London: BBC Books, 1990).

encompasses a far broader cultural sweep than cinema alone. Yet during the '90s, an entrepreneurially minded, strategic appropriation of that fact was central in creating the material conditions through which this imported culture's local resonance could in turn be reiterated, celebrated and explored with a frequency hitherto not experienced, within the unprecedented body of Scottish films produced in the period.

I should acknowledge that the central argumentative thrust to my analysis of 1990s Scottish cinema is not wholly original in certain regards. I do so not from a compulsion to flagellate, but rather, to flag exactly what is novel about the analytical approach employed in what follows. Most immediately, it must be conceded that the industrial and ideological centrality of American cinematic representations of 'Scotland', and the related preeminence of US popular cultural reference points and allegiances for successive generations of Scots, by now constitute insistent refrains within Scottish film and cultural criticism more generally. As early as 1946, local writers were arguing that "Hollywood and London, with a few exceptions, have presented the Scot"³³ on the cinema screen. The foundational text of Scottish film criticism, the 1982 anthology *Scotch Reels*, took as axiomatic the fact that "the discourses within which Scotland and the Scots have been represented in films... were deployed within production structures fashioned outside Scotland".³⁴ Hegemonic above all other such 'structures' is, it has routinely been claimed, the American one. Cairns Craig in 1983 bemoaned the fact that the Scottish "imagination's home is in America... our imaginations, tied to their American exile, know themselves defeated by our physical refusal to follow them".³⁵ More optimistically, John Caughie in 1989 acknowledged in a different way the overweening local presence of American cultural reference points. He argued that Scotland's canonic national mythologies could be productively juxtaposed with what were, for him, remarkably congruent US cinematic equivalents:

³³ Anon, *Scotland on the Screen* (Glasgow: Scottish National Film Studios, 1946), pg. 3.

³⁴ Colin McArthur, 'Scotland and Cinema: The Iniquity of the Fathers', in McArthur (ed.), *Scotch Reels: Scotland in Cinema and Television* (London: BFI, 1982), pg. 66.

³⁵ Cairns Craig, 'Visitors from the stars: Scottish film culture', in *Cencrastus*, n. 11 (New Year 1983), pg. 8.

The frontier territory of Europe... begs for comparison with the American West idealised as epic ground in popular fiction and film... And for the twentieth century... something of the mythology of Chicago, best represented in the thirties Gangster movie, echoes in the urban mythology of the Glasgow gangs of the twenties and thirties...³⁶

Much more recently, Douglas Bicket draws attention to what he sees as “the strong American influence in Scottish film output”, a phenomenon which “has no traditional basis or clear antecedents in Scottish literature”.³⁷ Finally, and perhaps most immediately relevant to the present study, Martin McLoone, setting out the parameters for a comparative approach to non-English British cinemas of the '90s (Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland), argues that many recent films produced within these cultures depict in common a “cultural universe [and] an imagined community that is Anglo-American in a broad sense rather than specifically British or Welsh [or Scottish, etc.]”³⁸ In this latter context, a film like *The Big Tease*, both in the central place it accords local encounters with American culture, and in the respective backgrounds of key creative personnel—director Kevin Allen’s previous project was *Twin Town* (GB, 1997), a movie often described as ‘the Welsh *Trainspotting*’³⁹—accords with McLoone’s provisional definition of the contemporary ‘Celtic’ film’s defining characteristics.

Moreover, 1990s Scottish cinema’s evolution also needs to be in part understood, as McLoone indicates, within a wider contemporary British context. Here, perceptions of pervasive American industrial and cultural influence are also legion. Firstly, this is so in historical terms reaching far beyond the last years of the twentieth century. Geoffrey

³⁶ John Caughie, ‘De-picting Scotland: film, myth and Scotland’s story’, in Timothy Ambrose (ed.), *Representing Scotland’s Story* (Edinburgh: Scottish Museums Council, 1989), pg. 95.

³⁷ Douglas Bicket, ‘Fictional Scotland: A “Realm of the Imagination” in Film, Drama and Literature’, in *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, Vol. 23. 1 (Jan 1999), pg. 12.

³⁸ Martin McLoone, ‘Internal Decolonisation? British Cinema in the Celtic Fringe’, in Robert Murphy (ed.), *The British Cinema Book 2nd Edition* (London: BFI, 2001), pg. 184. My insert. An earlier rehearsal of this argument can be found in McLoone, ‘Challenging Colonial Traditions: British Cinema in the Celtic Fringe’, in *Cineaste*, Vol. XXVI n. 4 (Fall 2001), *Contemporary British Cinema Supplement*, pp. 51-54.

³⁹ See Moya Luckett, ‘Image and Nation in 1990s British Cinema’, in Robert Murphy (ed.), *British Cinema of the 90s* (London: BFI, 2000), pg. 93.

Nowell-Smith, for example, famously argued in the mid '80s that, "the hidden history of cinema in British culture, and in popular culture in particular, has been the history of American films popular with the British public".⁴⁰ Much more recently, Michael Chanan has despaired that successive generations of British filmmakers, producers, distributors, exhibitors and legislators have, through various admixtures of the mercenary, the misguided and the mendacious, repeatedly become "caught up in a relationship of unequal interdependence with the Hollywood majors, a symbiosis amounting to collusion, with deleterious effects on production at home".⁴¹

More particularly, the 1990s have already begun to be understood as a decade dominated by the parallel attempts of British politicians and funding institutions (Channel 4's 1998 expansion of its film production arm FilmFour into a semi-autonomous 'mini-studio', the National Lottery production franchises created by the first Blair administration) and filmmakers, post-*Four Weddings and a Funeral* (Mike Newell, GB, 1994) and *Trainspotting*, to remodel British cinema along the lines of mainstream Hollywood industry. Julian Petley and Duncan Petrie, for example, opening a 2002 journal special issue on 'New British Cinema', noted the overarching centrality of the fact that, "ambitious producers and production companies tend increasingly to emulate Hollywood", concluding, "the impetus towards greater commercialism in the 1990s was to affect those very [domestic] institutions that had hitherto provided an alternative to... Hollywood-leaning internationalism".⁴² Elsewhere, John Hill identifies "a more general shift in attitudes towards support for film" amongst politicians and public and private domestic funders in '90s Britain, one "largely directed towards finding the means for sustaining a more commercial industry rather than cultivating cultural variety".⁴³ British cinema in the '90s witnessed, therefore, an ambitious collective attempt to achieve a vastly enhanced international competitive status, one that parallels and in part

⁴⁰ Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, 'But Do We Need It?', in Martin Auty & Nick Roddick (eds.), *British Cinema Now* (London: BFI, 1985), pp. 151-152.

⁴¹ Michael Chanan, *The Chronic Crisis of British Cinema* (London/Bristol: *Vertigo* magazine/UWE, 2003), pg. 18.

⁴² Julian Petley & Duncan Petrie, 'Editors' introduction', in *Journal of Popular British Cinema*, n. 5 (2002), pg. 3.

⁴³ John Hill, 'The Rise and Fall of British Art Cinema: A Short History of the 1980s and 1990s', in *Aura*, Vol. IV n. 3 (2000), pg. 28.

encompasses, albeit with significant distinctions, more local Scottish aspirations and activities of the same period.

It is clear, then, that this work's emphasis on the purportedly central 'American' characteristics of 1990s Scottish cinema builds upon, and is indebted to, a significant prior body of Scottish and British film and cultural criticism. However, the arguments presented here diverge markedly from those glossed above in that I predominantly *welcome* this defining aspect of '90s Scottish cinema, seeing it as a fundamentally enabling industrial development, and an intermittently progressive national representational phenomenon. For example, within Scottish criticism, the ubiquitous pervasion of American cultural influences within the domestic sphere has, in sharp contrast, been most often believed to result in an ideological oppression and perversion of the latter, a phenomenon in which typically, "we tend to be written by the dominant Scottish narratives rather than ourselves writing stories about Scotland"⁴⁴, in other words, something very much like a state of national cultural 'colonisation'.

Moreover, a very similar 'pervasion/perversion' scenario is already routinely applied within much British film criticism concerned to assess the industrial and cultural legacies of the '90s. For example, Mike Wayne perceives central "ideological skews in the cinematic representation of Britishness"⁴⁵ during the decade, particularly in the depiction of Britain as a country defined by its past, not present, in a slew of literary adaptations and historical epics produced with a beady eye for the Anglophilic elements of the North American market. Setting this state of affairs right, he argues, will require within the contemporary UK production industry, "a different set of institutional arrangements and cultural ambitions, one in which the American market is almost certainly *not* the primary one".⁴⁶ The Editor of *Sight and Sound*, Nick James, in yet more emphatic terms, excoriated the fact that, as he perceived matters at the start of the '00s, "accept[ance of]

⁴⁴ Colin McArthur, 'The Scottish Discursive Unconscious', in Alasdair Cameron & Adrienne Scullion (eds.), *Scottish Popular Theatre and Entertainment: historical and critical approaches to theatre and film in Scotland* (Glasgow: Glasgow University Library, 1996), pg. 86.

⁴⁵ Mike Wayne, 'The Re-invention of Tradition: British Cinema and International Image Markets', in *EnterText*, Vol. 2. 1 (Winter 2001/02), pp. 38-66, available @

http://www.brunel.ac.uk/faculty/arts/EnterText/issue_2_1.htm <accessed 19/07/05>

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Hollywood's methods of film-making as superior... without thought for the long-term consequences for film-making in Britain, is now a reflex action within the British film world".⁴⁷ Moreover, just as British cinema's 1990s trajectory has been interpreted in a holistic sense as something of a busted flush in representational and cultural terms, industrially the decade has been retrospectively narrated as a series of woefully picaresque, failed local experiments and flirtations with 'mid-Atlanticism'. Here, the material evidence is rather convincing. It takes in the embarrassing failure of the Lottery franchises to produce more than a trickle of generally unseen and critically unloved features, despite having between them a prior guarantee of £92.5 million of National Lottery monies over a six-year period between 1997 and 2003 to bankroll their activities. It also encompasses the collapse of FilmFour, the central domestic funder of the '90s, on July 9th 2002, unable to sustain its losses on a string of ambitiously budgeted 'British international' movies, such as *Charlotte Gray* (Gillian Armstrong, GB/Aus/Ger, 2001).⁴⁸

The existence of such highly charged material and critical contexts around the oft-perceived 'Americanisation' of modern Scottish culture and British cinema perhaps in part explains why preferred critical definitions of '90s and '00s Scottish cinema's cross-cultural allegiances and influences, whether in purported material or projected ideal forms, have tended to take a diametrically opposed tack to that suggested here. Critical peers have mostly preferred by contrast to argue for contemporary Scottish cinema's essentially 'European' aesthetic and thematic nature, moreover, with the 'Continental' here conceived as something approaching a binary opposite to American film industrial and cultural traditions. Tony McKibbin, noting *Ratcatcher* writer/director Lynne Ramsay's creative debt to the writings and films of Robert Bresson, extrapolates from this atomised fact the general truism that, "in the best of Scottish cinema, the European influence is never far away".⁴⁹ Elsewhere, the most authoritative critic of the

⁴⁷ Nick James, 'They Think It's All Over: British Cinema's US Surrender', in Murphy (ed.) *The British Cinema Book*, op. cit., pg. 301.

⁴⁸ For details, see Robert Murphy, 'Another false dawn? The Film Consortium and the franchise scheme', in Petley & Petrie (eds.) op. cit., pp. 31-35; John Hill, "'Changing of the guard": Channel 4, FilmFour and film policy', in ibid, pp. 53-63; Various, 'What went wrong at Britain's most powerful studio', in *The Guardian*, (12/7/02), *Friday Review* section, pp. 2-4.

⁴⁹ Tony McKibbin, 'Retouching the Real: Lynne Ramsay's *Ratcatcher*', in *Cencrastus*, n. 65 (2000), pg. 35.

contemporary Scottish scene, Duncan Petrie, dictates in no uncertain terms that, “the kind of production that has come to epitomise Scottish film-making in the 1990s... bears a strong affinity with the tradition of European Art Cinema”⁵⁰, citing the ’90s work of filmmakers such as Ramsay, Mullan, Gillies Mackinnon and Ken Loach as supporting evidence. However, such arguments are over-reliant on a too-credulous acceptance of ossified critical assumptions, particularly the ideation of the ‘European Art’ model and canon as a homogenised collation of post-WWII European filmmakers and filmmaking practices believed to unambiguously instantiate the ideal of aesthetically and industrially self-sufficient and distinctive local alternatives to Hollywood.⁵¹ Moreover, such contemporarily accepted ‘European’ definitions of Scottish cinema are damagingly selective, in the attention they pay to a carefully delimited range of institutions, films and filmmakers that already fit a pre-determined critical conclusion. These arguments about Scotland thus take their place within a much wider Film Studies tradition in which “the writing of a national cinema has predominantly addressed moments of exception and not the ‘global’ picture... lacking... a proper historical contextualisation of those moments and their location in wider political cultural considerations”.⁵² By contrast, this work chooses texts and institutions for discussion not on the dominant basis of a conservative version of ‘exceptional’ artistry. Neither does it make individual films’ subjectively perceived progressive critiques of ‘Scotland’ and ‘Scottishness’ the dominant criteria for inclusion in the following discussion. Rather, particular films are accorded especial attention because they allow—often, as with a mainstream text like *The Big Tease*, precisely *through* their commercial and ideological problems and disappointments—a clear-sighted ‘contextualisation’, and thus, explanation, of the material reasons behind Scottish cinema’s rapid 1990s expansion, not to mention the pressures shaping the most

⁵⁰ Petrie, *Contemporary Scottish Fictions...* op. cit., pg. 202. See also Petrie, ‘Economics and Aesthetics in the New Scottish Cinema’, in *TwonineTwo: essays in visual culture*, n. 1 (2000), pp. 112-124; Petrie, ‘Devolving British Cinema: The New Scottish Cinema and the European Art Film’, in *Cineaste*, Vol. XXVI n. 4 (Fall 2001), *Contemporary British Cinema Supplement*, pp. 55-57.

⁵¹ For a seminal influence on received definitions of ‘European Art’ cinema in terms of a binary opposition to ‘Hollywood’, see Steve Neale, ‘Art Cinema as Institution’, in *Screen*, Vol. 22.1 (1981), pp. 11-41; for critical discussion of the binary itself, see Dimitris Eleftheriotis, *Popular Cinemas of Europe: Studies of Texts, Contexts and Frameworks* (New York: Continuum, 2001), pp. 9-13.

⁵² Susan Hayward, *French National Cinema*, (London: Routledge, 1993), pg. xi.

recurrent aesthetic and representational strategies employed by local features of the decade.

On one hand, therefore, my identification and privileging of a corpus of 1990s Scottish-American films (and its attendant neglect of a sizeable, contemporaneous body of local work more engaged with European art traditions) should be understood as a particular difference of critical opinion and emphasis between the present writer and his key predecessors. On the other, however, my near-exclusive concentration upon 1990s Scottish cinema's transatlantic strand also represents a deliberate response to far more general methodological issues germane to national cinema criticism as a specific school within Film Studies. With regards to national cinema traditions' distinctive generic, aesthetic and thematic elements, Thomas Elsaesser argues that, "a strong national cinema must feed on its predecessors and thus stand in a vampiric relation to what has gone before".⁵³ Two observations about Elsaesser's assertion help further rationalise the methodological approach and chosen case studies which together define this thesis. The first is simple: what goes for locally specific acts of filmmaking also applies to locally specific acts of film criticism. Yet if that point is conceded, then the second observation to make of Elsaesser's argument is that it relies on an inaccurate application of metaphor. His notion of 'vampiric' cultural practices glosses a totalising idea of national cinema *per se*. In that hypothetical model, contemporary practitioners draw creative sustenance and guidance from the work of their predecessors: the present controls and selectively exhumes and exploits the past. Yet as the metaphorical vehicle for a critical conception of 'national cinema' in the widest possible sense, it is more logical that the figure of the vampire conjures images of an 'undead' past, the everlasting, baleful power and influence of which destroys the vitality and evolutionary potential of the present: contemporary adherence to received precedent precludes the possibility of innovative practice, whether filmmaking or film critical.

⁵³ Thomas Elsaesser, 'Images for Sale: The 'New' British Cinema', in Lester Friedman (ed.), *British Cinema and Thatcherism: Fires Were Started* (London: UCL Press, 1993), pg. 60.

In other words, one of the dangers posed by adoption of a national model of film criticism is that the (proper) necessity of locating one's present critical practice in relation to the preferred analytic models and textual canons established by earlier scholars can all too easily be reified into an end in itself, rather than a means by which the cinema the models and canons refer to is better understood or re-imagined. This is so whether a contemporary scholar's relationship to their national critical past is one marked by reverence or revisionism. The ostensible object of enquiry, the films, filmmakers and film institutions which in large part constitute a national cinema, is superseded by an urge to exhaustively gloss, reiterate or reshape the sum total of existing critical commentary on the former. In a narcissistic move, criticism becomes its own sufficient object of enquiry: the same texts and practitioners are revisited time and time again, in a largely or wholly inward-looking contest for scholarly authority, the intellectual equivalent of trench warfare. It is for this reason that many national film traditions come to conceal what Julian Petley, writing about the British example, terms "long submerged lost continent[s]"⁵⁴, No Man's Lands populated by neglected or forgotten films and filmmakers. Alan Lovell, also writing about Britain, describes this phenomenon more prosaically, as a division of national cinemas into "known" and "unknown" regions.⁵⁵ A central reason for privileging the Scottish-American cycle of films and filmmakers discussed in this thesis, therefore, is that this strategy discussion of relatively 'unknown' (because un- or under-examined) works and figures within Scottish cinema studies. Circumnavigation of the critically privileged, 'known' European tradition within Scottish cinema instigates a different critical debate about the relative importance and desirability of different external influences and models *and* extends the textual and institutional borders of the national cinema under examination in the first place. Scottish cinema's 'known continent' becomes larger; its 'unknown' counterpart contracts accordingly.

That said, while I present '90s Scottish cinema's self-willed 'transatlanticisation' as a fundamentally progressive, because industrially enabling, development during the first

⁵⁴ Julian Petley, 'The Lost Continent', in Charles Barr (ed.), *All Our Yesterdays: 90 Years of British Cinema* (London: BFI, 1986), pg. 118

⁵⁵ See Alan Lovell, 'British Cinema: The Known Cinema?', in Murphy (ed.) *The British Cinema Book*, op. cit., pp. 200-205.

part of the decade, later sections of this work see the latter's second half as a period in which, generally speaking, this hegemonic strategy came to offer a steadily diminishing series of financial, and more fundamentally, national cultural returns, as witnessed by many post-1995 Scottish films' poor commercial performances and problematic representations of contemporary national identity and society. As with the case of late '90s British cinema as a whole, within Scotland the industrial (and to a degree, representational) achievements of seminal early '90s successes projects were repeatedly misinterpreted, unrealistically seen as offering indefinitely and uncomplicatedly reproducible blueprints for international commercial success. '90s Scotland is a specific example of a more general phenomenon repeatedly documented in film historical criticism, which often must, as John Caughie notes, "piece together the steps by which practices become routines... working assumptions [on the part of institutions, funders and filmmakers alike] which persist long after the conditions which legitimated them have withered away".⁵⁶ Indeed, observers of the Scottish and British milieus of the '90s have regularly come to read the development of both in just such terms. In the British context, Murray Smith cites the symptomatic example of *Trainspotting*, contemporaneously taken as "heralding an emerging vitality in British filmmaking", but after the subsequent failure to regularly repeat its international commercial and critical successes, now understood in retrospect as "a landmark... after the fashion of... a striking monument in an otherwise bland landscape".⁵⁷ There exist many examples of congruent Scottish perspectives, even amongst some of the actors involved with *Trainspotting*, Kevin McKidd, ultimately arguing that the film "did a lot of damage, not just to the Scottish film industry but the whole British movie scene... it gave everyone this big, false sense of bravado".⁵⁸ Peter Mullan went yet further, arguing in 1998 that,

Trainspotting... changed the whole nature of independent cinema in Britain: the great thing about it was that it gave huge interest to [the former] but the worst thing about it was that for

⁵⁶ John Caughie, *Television Drama: Realism, Modernism and British Culture* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), pg. 14.

⁵⁷ Murray Smith, *Trainspotting* (London: BFI, 2002), pp. 87-88.

⁵⁸ Yakub Qureshi & Aiden Smith, 'Iconic film "sent UK industry off rails"', in *Scotland on Sunday*, (11/7/04), pg. 6.

less than a £2 million investment [by sole funder Channel 4] there was a £90 million return. Not even the maddest Hollywood mogul would expect that percentage of profit, but [British funders and producers now] do.⁵⁹

One of the most complex aspects of *Trainspotting*'s influence over, and importance for, subsequent Scottish cinema relates to the film's rapidly evolving totemic status, from universally acclaimed touchstone to controversial millstone.

However, the fundamental differences between the 'practice to routine' histories of British, and more specifically Scottish, cinemas of the 1990s are two-fold; critical assessments of each therefore need to reach distinctive conclusions. Firstly, US-originated filmmaking influences and -directed aspirations cannot be easily or completely dismissed in the Scottish case. This is because here, the former were instrumental in *creating* a local production base from near-scratch, as opposed to merely *redirecting* and/or thwarting the evolution of a British one that already clearly existed, in however industrially and culturally parlous a form. Take, for example, Alexander Walker's wearily fatalistic argument that by 2000, "essentially the British film industry was in the same state it had always been... the exhilaration of boom, then the all too common reality of bust"⁶⁰, the transient successes and inflated hopes of the mid '90s all come to nothing. In the *British* context Walker flags, there may plausibly be a debate to be had regarding whether his view of the '90s is glibly simplistic or grimly salient. However, the idea of using it to gloss the specifically Scottish case is nonsensical. For the local production sector in 2000 to be 'essentially in the state it had always been'—as in 1990, say—then some twenty features, a large range of institutional structures, several million pounds of newly available public finance and a few hundred individuals listed in the annual *Film Bang* industry directory as professionally engaged within the local film and television industries would all have to vanish into thin air.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Paul Power, 'His Name is Peter', in *Film Ireland*, n. 67 (Oct/Nov 1998), pg. 22. My inserts.

⁶⁰ Alexander Walker, *Icons in the Fire: The Rise and Fall of Practically Everyone in the British Film Industry* (London: Orion, 2004), pg. 309.

The second fundamental difference between the contemporaneous, parallel Scottish and British recourse to American film industrial and creative exemplar is that the former is harder to depict than the latter as an unambiguous process of collective self-abnegation. '90s Scottish cinema's self-willed 'transatlanticisation' included a self-conscious component of peripheral differentiation from the practices, values and identities associated with a British metropolitan film industrial and cultural core. Scottish filmmakers' eager embrace of American influences and practices (as perhaps with post-WWII Scottish enthusiasm for US popular culture more generally) was thus a multi-faceted, even paradoxical, process of self-definition, variously characterised by degrees of local accession, rejection and transformation with regards to the influence of other, more powerful national cinemas. Given this complexity, monolithic critical dismissals of American cinema's hegemonic pervasion within its '90s Scottish counterpart are inappropriate and ultimately unworkable.

1990s Scottish cinema: exegesis

Having now introduced in abstract form my key arguments about the material centrality and ideological complexity of US hegemony within 1990s Scottish cinema, I need in conclusion to convince readers that these can in fact be productively and appropriately applied to detailed textual analysis of the body of films that constituted that cinema. I propose to perform that task by examining a film emerging from '90s Scotland that might at first sight seem fiercely resistant to my analysis, given its deliberately 'un-American' narrative, political and cultural projects.

Carla's Song (Ken Loach, GB/Ger/Sp, 1997) was based upon its screenwriter, Paul Laverty's, experience working as a human rights observer in Nicaragua during the mid 1980s. He witnessed at first hand the devastation caused by that country's brutal civil war, sponsored by the Reagan and Bush administrations in their attempt to overthrow Nicaragua's radical, democratically elected new political order. Accordingly, Laverty set the narrative of *Carla's Song* in Glasgow and Nicaragua during 1987. George, a Glasgow

bus driver whose personal immaturity is matched only by its political equivalent, falls in love with Carla, a Nicaraguan refugee and supporter of the revolutionary Sandinista government. His relationship with Carla leads George to accompany her back to her home country. Shocked by the poverty and carnage he witnesses there, George ultimately proves incapable either of staying with Carla or of playing an active role in defending the embattled revolutionary settlement. He therefore returns to Glasgow. Lavery thus aimed to publicise what he saw as successive American governments' illegal and immoral interference in the affairs of Central America, and the simultaneous denial of this central fact in received historical commentary:

It's quite surreal to see history rewritten before your eyes quite so crudely... despite the US's creation of the Contras and the billion-dollar investment in attacking Nicaragua, the Sandinistas still somehow caused the war.⁶¹

The narrative of *Carla's Song* is deliberately structured to communicate this perspective. Key in this regard is the character of Bradley, an American Sandinista supporter and friend of Carla's. Bradley's potted and unambiguous exposition for George of a US-plotted and -financed war of aggression is crucial: "The CIA, kid, runs this whole show".

Carla's Song appears a stubbornly aberrant film for a writer seeking to persuade others of the existence of a 1990s 'Scottish-American' cinema. This is so in two ways. Firstly, the film's diegesis sets out to highlight a tawdry episode in the recent American past and through the character device of George, the quintessential innocent abroad, to provoke audiences' indignation at it. Secondly, the professional reputations and public pronouncements of both director Ken Loach and Lavery placed them fundamentally and publicly out of step with the aspirational celebration of American cinematic and wider cultural influences current within the contemporary Scottish cinema within which they worked (think back, for example, to *The Big Tease*). The duo have proved more prolific than any other creative team in Scotland post 1995, to date producing a further four

⁶¹ Paul Lavery, *Carla's Song: original screenplay* (London: Faber & Faber, 1997), pp. xix-xx.

features - *My Name is Joe* (Gb/Fr/Ger/It/Sp, 1998), *Bread and Roses* (Gb/Fr/Ger/It/Switz, 2000), *Sweet Sixteen* (Gb/Ger/Sp/Fr/It, 2002) and *Ae Fond Kiss* (GB/Bel/Ger/It/Sp, 2004). Yet despite this fact, there is no other living British filmmaker from whom so many Scottish peers have been so anxious to explicitly distance their own respective practices than Loach. Throughout the late '90s, he was regularly and popularly seen in Scotland to personify an industrially and culturally outdated, socially engaged, identifiably *British* national cinema.

As with so many other matters during the late 1990s, the makers of *Shallow Grave* provided an imitative template for subsequent fellow travelers. Around the time of that film's domestic cinema release, producer Andrew MacDonald boldly portrayed it as an aesthetic, commercial and political polar opposite of, and antidote to, a historically dominant social realist tradition of British cinema in which, "you have to make yourself go and see films like *Naked* [Mike Leigh, GB, 1993] or *Ladybird, Ladybird* [Ken Loach, GB, 1994]... they're all so desperate to say there's something wrong with something".⁶² Irvine Welsh, author of the 1993 novel *Trainspotting*, an adaptation of which became the *Shallow Grave* team's next feature, signaled his approval of the latter by making explicitly contrastive reference to Loach: "I would have been a wee bit despondent... if they had made [*Trainspotting*] in the Loach fashion because I don't think we need another Ken Loach".⁶³ Later Scottish filmmakers similarly sought to disavow the nationally specific British cinema tradition they understood Loach to head. Instead, they aligned themselves with a more internationally diffuse Scottish alternative. Lynne Ramsay, for example, protested of her debut feature *Ratcatcher* that, "I don't think... Loach would go near anything like that with a bargepole".⁶⁴ She constructed a conceptual opposition between an internationally marketable local filmmaking practice ("it would be great to see some movies being made in Britain in the style of the American Independents") with an archaic, nationally specific alternative ("the idea of a Scottish or a

⁶² Quoted in Nolan Fell, 'Deeply Shallow: Interview with Andrew MacDonald', in *Rushes*, (Jan/Feb 1995), pg. 21.

⁶³ Quoted in Kevin MacDonald, 'Afterword - interview with Irvine Welsh', in John Hodge, *Trainspotting and Shallow Grave: original screenplays* (London, Faber & Faber, 1996), pg. 118.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Trevor Johnston, 'The filth and the fury: interview with Lynne Ramsay', in *Time Out*, (10/11/99), pg. 25.

British film culture... it can be quite conservative").⁶⁵ Even a clearly sympathetic figure such as Peter Mullan, who acted the central role in *My Name is Joe*, and who broadly shares Loach and Lavery's radical political agenda, argued that their work illustrated the faults of a problematic, identifiably British, cinema tradition from which he wished to distinguish his own more cosmopolitan Scottish directorial practice:

Almost all social-realist films revert to melodrama if and when it suits them... take *My Name is Joe*... The tradition I come from in terms of cinema and art is experimental and very un-British... For me, *Orphans* was about harking back to... those American movies by Douglas Sirk.⁶⁶

It is ironic, but also absolutely indicative of the hegemonic creative and industrial prescriptions and beliefs structuring 1990s Scottish cinema, that its most prolific filmmaker was nonetheless understood by his peers to also be its most anachronistic, because least internationally (specifically, American) influenced and accommodating.

Yet *Carla's Song* offers evidence for the existence of a contemporary 'Scottish-American' cinema because it inadvertently undercuts the "schematic didacticism"⁶⁷ of its own hostile critique of US military, economic and cultural hegemony exercised on a global scale. This self-subversion proceeds on two levels. Firstly, through native character discourses expounded within the film (although here 'character' is not fully sufficient as a descriptive term—the key point is that the Nicaraguan *campesinos* we see on screen are real-life ones, not professional actors assuming a role). Secondly, certain filmmaking choices on the part of Loach himself (especially those to do with casting) are equally vital here. Ultimately, *Carla's Song* is not only forced to acknowledge, but also actively engages with, the attraction and resonance of the American cultural behemoth from which it ostensibly seeks as much distance as possible.

⁶⁵ Ibid, pg. 24.

⁶⁶ Quoted in Liese Spencer, 'Tearing the roof off: interview with Peter Mullan', in *Sight & Sound*, Vol. 9. 4 (Apr 1999), pg. 14.

⁶⁷ Jonathan Buchsbaum, 'Carla's Song', in *Cineaste*, Vol. XXIII n. 4 (1998), pg. 52.

Turning first to the native character discourses destabilising *Carla's Song's* intended anti-US political critique, key are the discourses of the actual *campesinos* George has successive encounters with during the film's Nicaraguan section (the latter constitute part of his political and historical education, and by extension, that of the film's audiences). While the content of these meetings and their respective places within the narrative trajectory of *Carla's Song* were to some degree pre-scripted by Laverty, Loach has proposed that the scenes in question are in fact 'real' in a comparatively unmediated sense. This is purportedly so because, in addition to their functional narrative and thematic roles within the film, these sequences were also conceived by the filmmakers as public forums through which individual Nicaraguans could speak their own minds and address an international audience on a range of topics and lived experiences (most centrally, the Sandinista project and the civil war), rather than simply being mouthpieces for the filmmakers' views and desires. For sympathetic viewers of *Carla's Song*, one of the film's strongest features is that in its Nicaraguan section, "the boundaries of the fictional and the real are blurred".⁶⁸ Jacob Leigh goes further, seeing the film's *campesino* sequences as examples of documentary testimonial, rather than fictional products of a highly constructed, misleading realist effect manipulated by the director and associated filmmakers for their own partisan ends. As such, they are emblematic of "the realism of Loach's best work"⁶⁹ generally. As Loach himself presents matters:

This is clearly what these people actually thought... obviously, Paul had written the script, and the script is contained within the scene, but there was no way one could suggest to them what they ought to say... as far as it's possible to be, this is the real thing.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Pauline Dodgson-Katiyo, 'Moving the Centre: Loach's Politics of Solidarity in *Carla's Song*', in Guido Rings & Rikki Morgan-Tamosunas (eds.) *European Cinema: Inside Out, Images of the Self and the Other in Postcolonial European Film* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag, 2003), pg. 110.

⁶⁹ Jacob Leigh, *The cinema of Ken Loach: art in the service of the people* (London: Wallflower Press, 2002), pg. 13.

⁷⁰ Quoted in Filmmakers' Commentary, *Carla's Song DVD Special Edition New Director's Cut* (Universal Pictures, 2004)

Crucially, however, one ‘real thing’ expounded by both representatives of Scottish urban working class and Nicaraguan peasant cultures portrayed in the film are strong subjective allegiances to Classical Hollywood cinema. For example, in George’s sole, brief encounter with an aging *campesino* at a bus stop, the two men do no more than dispute whether a line of film dialogue the former quotes is spoken by Yul Brynner in *The Magnificent Seven* (John Sturges, USA, 1960), or Paul Newman in *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (George Roy Hill, USA, 1969). Loach argued that the choice of George’s occupation, a Glasgow bus driver, was “not an accident... the kind of people he gets on his bus [during the explicatory Glaswegian prologue section of *Carla’s Song*]... are exactly the same kind of people he meets in Nicaragua.”⁷¹ However, one way in which they are ‘the same’, as this brief scene witnesses, is through a shared identification with precisely the kind of idealised American cinematic heritage which ’90s Scottish peers identified Loach, Lavery and their films as definitively alienated, or at very least clearly distinct, from.

Given the historical context of *Carla’s Song*’s narrative, it might be expected that the legitimacy of many of the Western’s embedded ideological discourses – the necessary triumph of White civilisation over Native tradition, the legitimacy of White recourse to armed force and extirpation in defence of personal honour and familial security, the glorification of individual liberty conceived against a primarily hostile ideation of the State’s essentially repressive political agency – would be explicitly rejected by the film’s narrative protagonists. Yet American film and popular cultures evidently continue to occupy a centrally important place within processes of individual subjectivity and interchange between Scottish and Nicaraguan cultures, as *Carla’s Song* represents, and indeed, facilitates, these. Of course, this irony might be explained away as a form of collective false consciousness created and perpetuated by a globalised American economic, military and cultural hegemony. Loach, for example, complained, in terms echoing hostile critical strictures on the perceived ‘Americanisation’ of contemporary Scottish and British cinemas, that “the irony is that the [audiovisual] culture [Nicaraguans] get is Hollywood, or the American industrial cinema, television. So the

⁷¹ Quoted in Graham Fuller (ed.), *Loach on Loach* (London: Faber & Faber, 1998), pg. 109. My insert.

people who wrecked them are still sending their cultural exports to the country.”⁷² Yet this explanation would be more convincing were the makers of *Carla's Song* not comparably deferential towards the authority of ‘American industrial cinema’ in certain of their own key creative choices and working practices. Ultimately, what *Carla's Song* illustrates is the extent to which American cinema’s international resonance and popularity were so keenly felt within a traditionally peripheral Scottish counterpart, that the latter’s own self-representations of national history and identity found it difficult to go ahead without some form of explicit engagement, whether deferential or contestatory, with the former.

Central in this regard is the fact that the locus of political authority and knowledge within *Carla's Song*, one that actively seeks to deconstruct American military and political hegemony, is not a Scot—George’s naïveté sees to that—nor a Nicaraguan—Carla’s prior traumas preclude it—but an American, Bradley. The diegetic source of Bradley’s privileged status is revealed in the film’s final scene. As George bids him farewell before leaving for Scotland, Bradley volunteers the terms of his own hitherto mysterious background: “CIA. ’81 – ’84. Honduras”. Bradley knows from direct participatory experience, the brutality and illegitimacy of US covert operations in Latin America. George’s only possible response is at once comic and self-deprecating, apologetically satirising the limited historical experience, power and influence that accrue both to himself and the national culture that he comes from: “Bus driver. Doubledecker. Number 72. Glasgow.” Paradoxically, while *Carla's Song* protests against the historical abuse and extent of American global hegemony, it at the same time most clearly associates an alternative, enlightened political consciousness and the attendant possibility of progressive reformation not with that hegemony’s variously oppressed ‘others’, Nicaraguans or Scots, but with its own former representative.

Moreover, Bradley’s textual authority also has an extra-diegetic source. He is, after all, a fictional American played by a real-life Hollywood star, Scott Glenn. A signature aspect of Ken Loach’s directorial practice involves its conscious mixing of professional, ‘name’

⁷² Quoted in Filmmakers’ Commentary, op. cit.

actors with unknown non-professionals, whose personal background is of direct relevance to the roles they are invited to act. In *Carla's Song*, for example, this was the case with Oyanka Cabezas, who plays Carla. Loach subsequently admitted to second thoughts on the casting of Scott Glenn in *Carla's Song*, and the dramatic and thematic roles of Glenn's character: "we've all had second thoughts about the structure of the film".⁷³ Bradley is indeed something of a paradox, at once doubly authoritative because American (star and political insider-turned-activist), and yet using this status to inculcate an anti-authoritarian, anti-American political consciousness in George, and by extension, *Carla's Song's* audiences. Thematically speaking, American political domination is contested within *Carla's Song* from without, but only with explicit license and guidance from lapsed representatives of that repressive order. Analogously, the film itself forms (despite initial appearances) part of an emergent 1990s Scottish cinema whose project of local cultural expression ultimately felt compelled to seek, gladly most often, even if not here, a rapprochement with the economic and ideological capital of US cinema past and present.

The troubled textual and ideological excesses of *Carla's Song*, rooted to a significant degree in the circumstance of its production within a historically marginal, but latterly emergent, 1990s Scottish cinema, indicate the bifurcated nature of the most appropriate critical approach to adopt towards the latter. On one hand, the creation then consolidation of a local production base through enthusiastic local adoption and adaptation of American cinematic precedents undoubtedly had many at best ambiguous national cultural and representational consequences. Yet proper admission of such problematic aspects must coexist with an acknowledgement that, without industrial expansion catalysed and fostered along transatlantic lines, cinema would be making a far more fragmentary contribution to contemporary Scottish cultural production and expression than is presently the case, in however problematic or incomplete forms. A recurrent range of representational and ideological flaws, silences and contradictions witnessed within

⁷³ Quoted in Susan Ryan & Richard Porton, 'The Politics of Everyday Life', in *Cineaste*, Vol. 24. 1 (Winter 1998), available @ www.lib.berkeley.edu/MRC/LoachInterview.html <accessed 25/07/05>; see also Fuller, op. cit., pg. 109.

1990s Scottish cinema is no reason to damn that embryonic industrial and cultural edifice as irredeemably compromised.

This thesis will argue, then, that the material reasons for Scottish cinema's emergence during the '90s, and that cinema's dominant representational characteristics, do not illustrate, as others would be wont to posit, unambiguously repressive American cultural and economic influence at work, Scotland "force-fed the dominant powers' cultural values because... imperialised."⁷⁴ Rather, the particular and fluid interaction between traditionally core and peripheral cinemas staged in '90s Scotland was a fundamentally enabling cross-cultural encounter, "the local dialogue of alien things", within a locally specific cultural tradition discovered that its "unique contemporary creativity is generated".⁷⁵ The *sine qua non* of American cinema, at once seductively foreign, comfortingly familiar and in part progressively and/or profitably reclaimable, was the central propellant of 1990s Scottish cinema, with an attendant range of progressive and regressive consequences.

The unavoidable ambiguity and complexity inherent in examination of Scottish cinema's 1990s process of 'becoming' is again signaled by *Carla's Song*. In the film's opening sequence, audiences discover that George is a talented caricaturist. A local colleague shows and complains about a scatological cartoon the former has drafted, of their manager, McGurk; George's dismissive, flippant response is that it is "a work of art". The caricature establishes in efficient fashion, the filmmakers' view of the positive and negative aspects to George's character. On the plus side, he is irreverent and intrinsically anti-authoritarian. More problematically, however, George is simultaneously implied to be immature and politically directionless (the cartoon shows McGurk scratching his testes rather than making a more substantive point about the latter's officious management style). In a carefully constructed structural and symbolic echo, *Carla's Song's* final sequence again draws attention to George's artistic skills. Before leaving to

⁷⁴ Cairns Craig, 'The Haunted Heart', in *New Statesman and Society* (5/10/90), pg. 27.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

return to Scotland, he presents Bradley with a pointed farewell gift, another caricature, this time of the latter.

A pessimistic reading might argue that, in caricaturing Bradley, George actually sketches a far more damning self-portrait. His final act crystallises his inherent limitations as a man, not to mention those of the 'works of art' produced within the contemporary national cinema and culture George himself hails from. Unable by their own admission to stay and participate in the 'real' American-dominated and -directed world of political and cultural struggle and authority, beyond an extraordinary, fleeting but never-to-be-repeated visit, both can ultimately settle only for (mis)representing that world in crude, childish fashion from the safe but stunting distance of definitively sidelined Scotland. Yet from an alternative, optimistic viewpoint, this exchange with Bradley symbolises George's achievement, through his exposure to the Nicaraguan war, of a realistically conceived state of enhanced personal and political maturity. The targets of his satire are now far more substantive; despite his sheltered background, George shows himself able to counter Bradley's earlier, self-important dismissals; his gesture remains located in the person he was before coming to Nicaragua, rather than being the heroic product of an unconvincing rebirth as an invincible, unshakable radical firebrand; George ultimately cannot set the wider world to rights, but his previously sheltered ignorance of its problems and conflicts is clearly dispelled.

If I prefer the positive reading of George's realistic maturation, this is perhaps because I offer here a parallel understanding of 1990s Scottish cinema's evolutionary trajectory. What ultimately emerged from this period was not a collective self-abnegation, an abortive, self-defeating filmic 'caricature' of real power and authority which continued to lie, unchanged, on the other side of the Atlantic. Rather, what requires documentation and celebration is an emergent Scottish cinema which during the 1990s recognised and acknowledged the precise terms of its historic marginality, and in so doing, began at last to effectively contest and transcend these.

Chapter 1

Trainspotting: structural ironies and central themes in Scottish film criticism

As the preceding introduction indicated, this work offers a historically informed account of 1990s Scottish cinema. However, such a project would be incomplete without due reference to the developing critical debate within which that cinema was - and is currently - defined and assessed. Historically inclined forms of national cinema studies do not simply set out an unfolding narrative of indigenous film production and infrastructural development. They potentially encompass, too, consideration of the ideas and arguments such films and institutions provoke, surveying a given film culture's rhetorical, as well as industrial, legacies.

In that spirit, this chapter constructs a brief history of Scottish film criticism, to set alongside the previous potted exposition of '90s Scottish cinema's industrial maturation. It aims to persuade readers that indigenous production of films and accompanying film criticism should be recognised as related, not demarcated activities. Scottish film-industrial and film-intellectual constituencies have struggled against analogous obstacles, consequences of Scottish cinema's long-term material underdevelopment. Yet recognition of such common cause is a regrettable lacuna within modern Scottish film culture, as shall be presently shown.

Acting upon my apprehension of them as essentially interrelated, rather than discrete, areas of Scottish film culture I adopt here a similar methodological approach to indigenous film criticism as I did towards local production and institutional activities in my introduction. There, it was proposed that textual analysis (extended discussion of particular films) be first located within, and informed by, an historical mapping of the industrial terrain which caused those texts to portray Scottish history, society and identity in the precise manner(s) in which they did. Here, textual analysis (detailed engagement with particular thinkers and their works) is first located within a historical mapping of the intellectual terrain which encouraged those thinkers to understand the national cultural significance of particular films and institutions in the ways they did. In other words, I consider the ideological discourses produced *within* film texts, and those produced *around* them, through successive acts of critical reception and appropriation, in broadly

similar fashions. Colin McArthur, perhaps the most influential and prolific critic discussed below notes that, “no act of criticism is innocent”.⁷⁶ And yet, Scottish film critics have more often applied this dictum to the cultural artifacts they study (‘no act of filmmaking is innocent’), without a comparable investment in the self-scrutiny that McArthur rightly calls for. This inconsistency has tended towards the long-term separation, rather than integration, of Scottish film intellectual and industrial concerns and agendas. In this chapter, I attempt to resituate the body of scholarly literature that comprises Scottish film criticism as the primary object, rather than prosecuting subject, of historical inquiry. I adopt such an approach in order to stress the homologous aspects of Scottish cinema’s critical and industrial components.

I am, therefore, predominantly concerned here to illuminate a developing intellectual tradition over the last quarter century, one consistently privileging and repeatedly reinterpreting certain constant key themes, aligning itself with shifting methodological orthodoxies at successive junctures, in response to the latterly rapid maturation of its central object of study. Yet I do not wish to engage in an Olympian adjudication between ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ ideas and utterances, raising a hierarchical edifice of canonical and marginalised writings and writers. If the common ground between Scottish cinema’s intellectual and industrial histories is important to stress because traditionally overlooked, apprehension of Scottish film criticism as a developing tradition of thought is useful because this perception too has been obscured. Scottish cinema’s academic study has generally been understood by many of its participants as a schismatic, rather than continually evolving, process. I try here to appropriate, rather than disown and distance myself from, Scottish film culture’s critical past.

The main body of this chapter therefore splits into two sections, the first of which might be labelled, ‘structuring ironies’, the latter, ‘central themes’. The ironies establish and explain in broad-brush fashion, criticism’s traditionally marginalised and/or ostracised place within Scottish film culture as a whole. The themes encompass a more detailed

⁷⁶ Colin McArthur, *Brigadoon, Braveheart and the Scots: Distortions of Scotland in Hollywood Cinema* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2003), pp. 2-3.

textual engagement with the writings of key critics, explaining the material and historical pressures that structured both their original utterances, and subsequent deconstructions and revisions of these (including, of course, my own).

To understand its long-term position within modern Scottish film culture as a whole, it needs to be acknowledged that Scottish cinema criticism has to date proved an intellectual tradition beset by three historic structuring ironies. These relate, in the order I raise them here, to the lack of a causal relationship between the respective volumes of indigenous film production and film critical activity since the early 1980s; to the congruent concerns of, but mostly antipathetic relationship between, Scottish filmmakers and film critics since that time; and finally, to Scottish film criticism's latterly jaundiced view of its own past use-value and achievements in the post-1990 context of a rapidly expanding indigenous film culture and production sector.

Irony I: inverse proportion

One of Scottish cinema history's most perplexing, enervating aspects involves the cast-iron relationship of inverse proportion that has held between the respective volumes of local film production and its accompanying critical discussion at any given point since the early '80s. For example, the collective intellectual project that established the enduring parameters of Scottish cinema studies was prosecuted in the first half of the 1980s, most famously through the 1982 *Scotch Reels* anthology, but equally significantly, in a series of related articles mostly published in the Scottish cultural review journal *Cencrastus* between 1981 and 1985.⁷⁷ The prolific critics at work during this time were in

⁷⁷ Colin McArthur (ed.), *Scotch Reels: Scotland in Film and Television* (London: BFI, 1982); key entries in the subsequent journal-based extension and evolution of that volume's strictures include: Douglas Bain *et al*, 'Woman, women and Scotland: *Scotch Reels* and political perspectives', in *Cencrastus*, n. 11 (New Year 1983), pp. 3-6; Cairns Craig, 'Visitors from the stars: Scottish film culture', in *Cencrastus*, n. 11 (New Year 1983), pp. 6-11; Brian McGill & Steve McIntyre, 'Scottish Film Culture: The High Road and the Low Road', in *Cencrastus*, n. 13 (Summer 1983), pp. 36-37; John Caughie, 'From 'Scotch Reels' to the 'Highland Fling': The Fourth International Festival of Film and Television in the Celtic Countries', in *Cencrastus*, n. 13 (Summer 1983), pp. 40-42; Steve McIntyre, 'New Images of Scotland', in *Screen*, Vol. 25. 1 (Jan/Feb 1984), pp. 53-61; Dave Wills, 'New Images of Scotland: New Questions', in *Cencrastus*, n. 15 (New Year 1984), pp. 40-43; Connie Balides, 'Another Time, Another Place... Another male view?', in *Cencrastus*, n. 16 (Spring 1984), pp. 37-41.

many ways local cineastes in search of a domestic cinema to talk about. Fundamentally, this was because there was so little of that cinema to interrogate, materially speaking. It is perhaps no coincidence that the energy generated by *Scotch Reels* appeared to dissipate (at least in print) around 1985. This was, after all, the point at which Bill Forsyth, the most prolific of all early '80s British, let alone Scottish, filmmakers relocated his career to North America. It was also the juncture at which local euphoria generated by the infant Channel 4's pronounced initial funding support for Scottish cinema (the broadcaster was the major financier across a portfolio of five Scottish features produced between 1982-84⁷⁸) was replaced by a chastened belief that, "the Channel has given encouragement to Scottish producers far beyond its own ability to commission".⁷⁹ Yet despite such daunting material obstacles, the early '80s was a remarkably energetic and productive period for Scottish film criticism. The *Scotch Reels* school drew up an ambitious outline of the historic contours shaping Scotland's cinematic representation, launched a fierce critique of the direction and aims of what little institutional support then existed for Scottish film culture, primarily through the auspices of the Scottish Film Council, and engaged in sustained polemic definition of what industrial and ideological shapes an emergent Scottish cinema should take.

When the '80s are reviewed in this light, the subsequent decade appears to be structured by a glaring paradox. The 1990s witnessed an unprecedented upsurge in the volume of indigenous production activity, yet this "new Scottish cinema"⁸⁰ lacked, unlike its far more fragmented, piecemeal '80s predecessor, a collective analytic gloss of any substance. The major anthology publication of the '90s, *From Limelight to Satellite*⁸¹, came right at the decade's outset. This volume was thus inevitably more engaged in retrospective commentary on the '80s (and yet further back). Its perspective on the '90s was necessarily futurological. Moreover, *From Limelight...* did not generate a substantial aftermath of critical debate in the way that *Scotch Reels* managed. The critical story of

⁷⁸ The films in question were: *Hero* (Barney Platts-Mills, GB, 1982), *Scotch Myths* (Murray Grigor, GB, 1982), *Another Time, Another Place* (Michael Radford, GB, 1983), *Living Apart Together* (Charles Gormley, GB, 1983), *Every Picture Tells A Story* (James Scott, GB, 1984).

⁷⁹ Doreen Taylor, 'Scottish Survey: Proving it's not all Bill Forsyth', in *Broadcast*, (16/8/85), pg. 21.

⁸⁰ Duncan Petrie, 'The new Scottish cinema', in Mette Hjort & Scott MacKenzie (eds.), *Cinema & Nation* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 153-169.

⁸¹ Eddie Dick (ed.), *From Limelight to Satellite: A Scottish Film Book* (London/Glasgow: BFI/SFC, 1990).

the 1980s is one of a cohesive, collective and continuously developing critique of Scottish cinema. By contrast, that of the '90s is far more atomised, constituted almost entirely as it is by the (distinguished) work of three, relatively isolated individuals, David Bruce, Colin McArthur and Duncan Petrie.⁸² Even the 2000 publication of Petrie's *Screening Scotland*, the first monograph-length study of Scottish cinema, represented a major critical intervention within a contemporary critical vacuum. Tony McKibbin was undoubtedly correct to argue in 2000 that, while "Scottish cinema has probably never looked healthier"⁸³, academic criticism had yet to substantively and collectively respond to that fact. More trenchantly, McArthur in 2001 complained that despite ever-increasing levels of academic publication on British cinema as a whole, "at the centre of th[is] current exciting turn... there is a screaming absence: Scottish film culture".⁸⁴

Put this way, close parallels start to become discernible between the respective natures of the contemporary challenges facing 1990s Scottish filmmakers and their local critical peers. Critically as well as industrially speaking, Scotland has nearly always been discussed with more conviction as a notional, not national, cinema. Symptomatically, perhaps the earliest academic discussion of the subject established a central analytic precedent, concentrating its attention on the *absence* of Scottish cinema, "the very fact that there has not been a mixing of the chemistry of filmmaking with the other strands of culture... common in Europe".⁸⁵ As recently as 2001, despite the undoubted industrial and institutional gains of the '90s, some felt that it still "remains a matter of debate

⁸² Important '90s works from the three are as follows. Bruce: *Scotland the Movie* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1996); McArthur: 'In praise of a poor cinema', in *Sight & Sound*, Vol. 3. 8 (Aug 1993), pp. 30-32; 'The Cultural Necessity of a Poor Celtic Cinema', in John Hill, Martin McLoone & Paul Hainsworth (eds.), *Border Crossing: Film in Ireland, Britain and Europe* (London/Belfast: BFI, Institute of Irish Studies, University of Ulster, 1994), pp. 112-125; 'The Scottish Discursive Unconscious', in Alasdair Cameron & Adrienne Scullion (eds.), *Scottish Popular Theatre and Entertainment: historical and critical approaches to theatre and film in Scotland* (Glasgow: Glasgow University Library, 1996), pp. 81-89; 'Artists and Philistines: The Irish and Scottish Film Milieux', in *Journal for the Study of British Cultures*, Vol. 5. 2 (1998), pp. 143-153. Petrie: 'Peripheral visions: film-making in Scotland', in Wendy Everett (ed.), *European Identity in Cinema* (Exeter: Intellect, 1996), pp. 93-102; 'Economics and Aesthetics in the New Scottish Cinema', in *TwonineTwo: essays in visual culture*, n. 1 (2000), pp. 112-124; 'The New Scottish Cinema', op. cit.; *Screening Scotland* (London: BFI, 2000).

⁸³ Tony McKibbin, 'Restless Natives: Scottish Cinema at the Crossroads', in *Cencrastus*, n. 64 (2000), pg. 14.

⁸⁴ Colin McArthur, 'Scotland the Movie: review', in *Journal of Popular British Cinema*, n. 2 (1999), pg. 167.

⁸⁵ Anon, 'Films and Scottish Culture', in *Scottish International*, n. 5 (Jan 1969), pg. 6.

whether there is yet a 'Scottish cinema'".⁸⁶ Scotland's unwelcome historic status as a "peripheral sector of [British cinema,] itself a marginal entity"⁸⁷, poses challenges for local critics, who, as McArthur points out, occupy a peripheral sector of British cinema studies. Within each constituency, local cultural work (whether film critique or film production) has to be produced without a fully-fledged indigenous tradition to draw upon and relate to.

Irony II: mutual suspicion

The shared nature of the challenges facing Scottish filmmakers and film critics in the last two decades of the twentieth century directs attention towards the second historic irony besetting Scottish cinema's academic study. Despite the congruent nature of the obstacles facing each group, mutually suspicious - even downright hostile - relations between filmmakers and critics have mostly prevailed since the early '80s. Scottish filmmakers and film critics have to date failed to enter into a sustained and mutually respectful process of dialogue. The key schism precipitated at the crucial moment of *Scotch Reels* centred upon that volume's uncompromising contention of the absolute "institutional failure of Scottish film culture"⁸⁸ past and present, in nurturing a formally and politically radical native feature cinema. Analogously, the *Scotch Reels* analysis also broadly castigated the manner in which local filmmakers were contemporaneously accessing metropolitan funding for indigenous feature work with more success than ever before. The individuals and projects in question here were those that benefited from a transient wave of largesse from Channel 4 between 1982-83, not to mention Bill Forsyth, and on his coattails, certain other, less celebrated peers who gained mainstream commercial funding for a short-lived Scottish comedic cycle including *Local Hero* (Forsyth, GB, 1983), *Comfort and Joy* (Forsyth, GB, 1984), *The Girl in the Picture* (Cary Parker, GB, 1985) and *Restless Natives* (Michael Hoffmann, GB, 1985).

⁸⁶ Anne T. Simpson, 'Scotland on film', in Michael Lynch (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Scottish History* (Oxford: OUP, 2001), pg. 241.

⁸⁷ Petrie, 'Peripheral Visions...', op. cit., pg. 93. My insert.

⁸⁸ Colin McArthur, 'Scotland and Cinema: The Iniquity of the Fathers', in McArthur (ed.), op. cit. pg. 68.

For the Scotch Reels school, the *primary* significance of a film such as *Local Hero* was not progressive, i.e. its writer/director's ability to make three features in four years, each with escalating budgets, representing a then-unprecedented local incursion into mainstream British and international image markets, "probably the first... identifiably (if arguably) Scottish [film] in subject matter, location, origination... to have achieved a real international success, critically and financially".⁸⁹ Rather, that film's impact was perceived as regressive, in that it was taken to constitute a politically and creatively conservative industrial and institutional "rallying point for a particular view of what Scottish film culture should look like", namely a quiescent collection of self-interested, would-be auteur figures, "the next clutch of Bill Forsyths".⁹⁰ By contrast, the Scotch Reels critics argued that the Scottish Film Council's scant financial resources and policy priorities should be channeled more towards the creation and support of a network of local film and video workshops operating outside of the industrial mainstream. These in turn would eventually foster "a cluster of oppositional strategies challenging dominant, ideologically loaded cinematic practices"⁹¹ found in commercial cinema *per se*. In this, the Scotch Reels movement looked to the contemporary English example of a geographically dispersed, culturally variegated range of community-based workshops (Amber, Sankofa Film and Video, Black Audio Film Collective, to name but a few) variously funded by local government and/or Channel 4's Department of Independent Film & Video. Such training and production centres produced work lauded then and now for its formal ambition and commitment to a radical exploration of identity politics, whether nationally, locally, ethnically and/or sexually framed.⁹² In stark contrast, the 'problem' with the most contemporarily prominent Scottish filmmakers and institutional film workers for the Scotch Reels project was their 'selfish' lack of such creative and political courage and collegiality, wedded instead "as far as possible to

⁸⁹ John Caughie, 'Support Whose Local Hero?', in *Cencrastus*, n. 14 (Autumn 1983), pp. 44-45.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pg. 45.

⁹¹ McGill & McIntyre, *op. cit.*, pg. 36.

⁹² For discussion of the '70s and '80s Workshop movement, see John Hill, "'Race' and the Politics of Form: The Black Workshops and the Films of Isaac Julien", in Hill, *British Cinema in the 1980s: issues and themes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), pp. 219-240; Michael O'Pray, 'The British Avant-Garde and Art Cinema from the 1970s to the 1990s', in Andrew Higson (ed.), *Dissolving Views: Key Writings on British Cinema* (London: Cassell, 1996), pp. 178-90.

commercial/feature film-making – to the exclusion of other conceptions”.⁹³ Such uncompromising critical views in turn provoked local filmmakers and film workers to apprehend in reductive fashion the infant Scottish film criticism as something of a cuckoo in the nest. For example, John Brown, Depute Director of the SFC, complained the year after *Scotch Reels*’ publication that the critical project it spearheaded had as “its basic unspoken aim... the destruction of that pernicious capitalist product, the commercially produced feature film”⁹⁴ just at the moment that local filmmakers had apparently become able for the first time to produce such works *en masse*. This view of *Scotch Reels* understood its emergence as a threat to, rather than a supporter of, the interests and aspirations of contemporary Scottish creative personnel.⁹⁵

The relationship between Scottish film culture’s critical, institutional and filmmaking constituencies never quite recovered from this inauspicious start. In the early ’90s, the relevant parties joined battle once more, this time around Colin McArthur’s proposal that Scottish cinema should look to European Art and Latin and South American cinemas for creative, political and institutional inspiration, in order to create a ‘Poor Celtic cinema’. McArthur defined that cinema in logistical terms through a commonsensical economic equation: juxtaposition of the total annual amount of film production monies then available from Scottish public funders with the average performance of domestic films at the UK box office dictated that budgets for Poor Celtic features should be capped at £0.3m (and ideally, would be rather less). This strategy, he argued, was not a capitulation to endemic industrial marginality, but rather a galvanising spur to aesthetic and national cultural innovation in Scotland. McArthur took it as axiomatic that escalating mercantile pressures would inevitably accrue to increasing levels of native access to the British and international commercial mainstream. This could only result in ever more regressive, because familiar, stereotypical and therefore marketable, portrayals of ‘Scotland’ and ‘Scottishness’ (as with the case of Bill Forsyth’s career trajectory a decade before): “the higher [Scottish filmmakers and producers] rack up film budgets... the more surely they

⁹³ Steve McIntyre, ‘National Film Cultures: Politics and Peripheries’, in *Screen*, Vol. 26. 1 (Jan/Feb 1985), pg. 74.

⁹⁴ John Brown, ‘Letter’, in *Cenchrastus*, n. 12 (Spring 1983), pg. 37.

⁹⁵ See John Caughie, ‘Representing Scotland: New Questions for Scottish Cinema’, in Dick (ed.), op. cit., pp. 18-19.

will become mired in regressive discourses about their country”.⁹⁶ By contrast, Poor Celtic Cinema’s reframing of “a meaningful production policy” for Scotland “in terms of cultural need” as opposed to “surrender to an industrial model”⁹⁷ made virtue out of necessity, freeing local filmmakers from the creatively and politically neutering effects of the commercial film business (of which they were emphatically not part in any case).

McArthur’s thesis provoked a scabrous institutional response, one that echoed and thus further entrenched the mutually hostile positions of Scottish film culture’s intellectual and industrial constituencies established in the early ’80s. Scottish film criticism, it was again alleged, was destructively hostile towards, because profoundly, wilfully ignorant of, the realities of the mainstream industry. Eddie Dick, then Director of the Scottish Film Production Fund, did not mince his words, dismissing the Poor Cinema model as an “ultimately defeatist interpretation of low budget filmmaking... poverty doesn’t free the cultural imagination, it ensnares it”.⁹⁸ Allan Shiach, Chair of the Scottish Film Council, was positively contemptuous, claiming McArthur’s proposed £0.3m ceiling on feature budgets was an arbitrary figure “plucked out of an academic old hat”.⁹⁹ Perhaps most telling of all was the response of Steve McIntyre, previously a critic associated with the Scotch Reels movement, but latterly an institutional worker engaged in consultation research on the future of audiovisual production in Scotland. On one hand, he also dismissed McArthur’s version of Poor Cinema as industrially unworkable, “offer[ing] neither the conditions for continuity of production nor for the creation of a cinema that genuinely engages audiences”.¹⁰⁰ Yet on the other, far more troubling for McIntyre was the extent to which a productive, ongoing exchange of ideas between intellectual and institutional constituencies on what form an industrially viable, culturally progressive and diverse Scottish cinema might take was missing from national film culture, “a debate that is extravagantly, tragically overdue”.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ McArthur, ‘Cultural Necessity...’, op. cit., pg. 121. My insert.

⁹⁷ McArthur, ‘In praise...’, op. cit., pg. 30.

⁹⁸ Eddie Dick, ‘Poor Wee Scottish Cinema’, in *Scottish Film*, n. 10 (4th Quarter 1994), pp. 19-20.

⁹⁹ Allan Shiach, ‘Letter: Cheap and Cheerless’, in *Sight & Sound*, Vol. 3. 9 (Sept 1993), pg. 64.

¹⁰⁰ Steve McIntyre, ‘Inventing the future – in praise of small films’, in *Scottish Film & Visual Arts*, n. 5 (3rd Quarter 1993), pg. 17.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

The hypothetical debate McIntyre called for is still to emerge. After the early Poor Cinema skirmish, the '90s witnessed little tending towards no public dialogue (however fraught) between Scottish critical and institutional sectors. In 1997, Desmond Bell used his inaugural lecture as Professor of Photography, Film and Television at Edinburgh's Napier University to reiterate the traditional critical refrain that, "debate about the development of film in Scotland has exclusively centred on commercial and industrial considerations with cultural and public interest questions marginalised".¹⁰² By contrast, Duncan Petrie, the major critical voice emergent in the late '90s and early '00s, proved far more supportive of dominant institutional policy rationales and initiatives of the former decade, arguing that these "were to transform the sector by nurturing the first green shoots of a distinctly Scottish film industry".¹⁰³ But, given that this view was advanced in something of a late '90s critical vacuum - as noted above - the possibility of subsequent extended dialogue between industry and academe on newly cordial terms was stymied, simply by virtue of a lack of active voices on the latter side.

The primary purpose of this potted history is not to adjudicate between the respective claims and agendas of Scottish film critics, filmmakers and film workers at particular junctures. Rather, it is to echo McIntyre's suspicion that Scottish film culture's development has been retarded by the lack of sustained dialogue between two of that culture's key constituent groups, despite the fact that the challenges facing each, given Scottish cinema's historic industrial and cultural marginality, mirrored, and were to some extent interdependent upon, each other. By contrast, Scottish critical and institutional personnel have to date seemed able to reach lasting agreement on but one thing: each group has typically believed the 'opposition' to be governed by a fundamental misunderstanding of Scottish cinema's industrial and cultural needs. The long-term absence of a synergetic meeting of minds, disappointing enough in itself, also points towards the existence of my third and final structuring irony besetting the evolution of Scottish film criticism.

¹⁰² Desmond Bell, 'A Hollywood on the Clyde', in *The Herald*, (3/5/97), pg. 21.

¹⁰³ Petrie, 'The New Scottish Cinema', op. cit., pg. 158.

Irony III: self-abnegation

This third irony in many senses explains, because it is the originary source of, the previous two. It relates to the status of the *Scotch Reels* analysis within later Scottish film critical work. On one hand, the *Scotch Reels* project is absolutely central to Scottish film criticism, because it essentially willed the discipline into existence, and set out an itinerary of its key, enduring concerns (which I identify and discuss at length in the latter part of this chapter under the rubric of themes). On the other, it ultimately failed to spark a continuous tradition of academic debate, because subsequent writers came to see *Scotch Reels* as a fundamentally misguided, even self-negating, analysis of Scottish cinema and national culture more generally. The key writings and ideas associated with *Scotch Reels* came to assume a deeply problematic, paradoxical importance: granted, they gave birth to a distinctive tradition of local cultural thought, but that tradition itself had - it increasingly came to be believed (and not just within institutional circles) - little of use to say about its object of study. The comparative '90s absence of substantive and productive critical-industrial dialogue, a facet of the perplexing wider absence of critical commentary on the rapidly expanding Scottish cinema of the period, can be traced to the fact that, during the decade, many critics active in the field felt compelled to start over. They believed it necessary to dismantle their own critical heritage before they could say anything at length about the area of Scottish culture that heritage was supposed to illuminate and guide.

I will return to this point later, but the changing, ironic status of the *Scotch Reels* moment can be illustrated in a preliminary, stark fashion here through reference to the radically changing ideas of one of the project's original participants. Cairns Craig, in an essay in the *Scotch Reels* volume surveying Scottish literary history from the eighteenth century on, set out in absolutely representative terms, that book and wider critical project's central, sweeping, polemical axiom, namely, the barren, perverted courses up to the present, not just of Scottish film, but of modern Scottish *national* culture itself. This lamentable state of historical affairs left would-be contemporary creative practitioners, filmic or otherwise, deeply handicapped, absolutely bereft of progressive local cultural

traditions that could inform their work, and with which the latter could enter into productive dialogue:

The problem... left to twentieth-century Scottish art is that there are no tools which the artist can inherit from the past which are not tainted, warped, blunted by the uses to which they have been put.¹⁰⁴

Yet just over a decade later, Craig had come to see his earlier analysis not as one that correctly, productively diagnosed the central problems facing modern Scottish culture. Instead, he latterly perceived its terms as constitutive of one of that culture's central problems in and of itself, because of the destructively pessimistic, alienated tenor of *Scotch Reels*' assessment (or rather, denigration) of the national culture from which it sprang:

What the Scotch Myths debate pointed to was not the tawdriness of Scottish culture... but to the profound hatred of the intellectuals for the culture they inhabited... They did not want to carry the burden of the Scottish past; they did not want to negotiate with the actualities of Scottish culture: they wanted to abolish it and create it anew in their own image.¹⁰⁵

This striking revisionism echoed throughout 1990s Scottish cultural criticism more generally, a tectonic intellectual shift that contemporarily perceived a "crisis not of the national culture *per se* but of the critical agenda"¹⁰⁶ within which the former's alleged

¹⁰⁴ Cairns Craig, 'Myths against History: Tartanry and Kailyard in 19th-Century Scottish Literature', in McArthur (ed.), op. cit., pp. 14-15.

¹⁰⁵ Cairns Craig, 'Absences', in Craig, *Out of History: Narrative Paradigms in Scottish and English Culture* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1996), pg. 107; n.b.: Craig here refers to the title of an exhibition of Scottish popular cultural ephemera staged at the 1981 Edinburgh Festival, but he deliberately uses this as an umbrella term covering the *Scotch Reels* volume and its contributors' central arguments.

¹⁰⁶ Adrienne Scullion, 'Feminine Pleasures and Masculine Indignities: Gender and community in Scottish drama', in Christopher Whyte (ed.), *Gendering the Nation: Studies in modern Scottish literature* (Edinburgh: EUP, 1996), pg. 202.

(non-)achievements - including its persistent inability to produce a sustainable indigenous feature cinema - had previously been despairingly assessed. Representatively, David McCrone, with the *Scotch Reels* volume specifically in mind, proposed that the most contemporarily pervasive and distorting constructions of Scottish culture and identity were to be found not in individual creative acts, but in their recent intellectual counterparts, “the limited discourses adopted by Scottish intellectuals in their analysis of [Scottish] culture”.¹⁰⁷ A hegemonic 1990s re-reading of the *Scotch Reels* critique performed a *détournement* upon the latter’s central stricture: now, it was local film theorists, not artists, who were understood to be bereft of tools inherited from the past ‘not tainted, warped, blunted by the uses to which they have been put’. Contemplation of this supposedly self-made oubliette may well explain why indigenous film criticism failed to keep anything like comparable pace with the marked upsurge in Scottish film production during the ’90s.

The last point to make about consideration of this final entry in the triumvirate of ironies structuring the development of Scottish film criticism is that, like its two counterparts, it becomes most productive when used to indicate ways in which the challenges and agendas facing contemporary Scottish filmmaking and film critical constituencies are, despite outward appearances, notably congruent. This is so especially in the shared late twentieth-century imperative to confront what looked like unusable pasts in ways that could foster and then reliably sustain a critical mass of local cultural production. However, it could be said that ’90s Scottish filmmakers and film workers, through their enterprising ’90s engagement with American cinema’s economic and cultural hegemonies, both local and international, rose to this challenge with more speed and success than their contemporary critical peers. The question thus posed relates to the manner in which contemporary Scottish film criticism might perform a comparable manoeuvre, in order to restate its necessary, fully active place within Scottish film culture. In answer to that quandary, I want to argue in the rest of this chapter that, despite having identified certain key problems and ironies besetting Scottish film criticism, the

¹⁰⁷ David McCrone, *Understanding Scotland: The sociology of a stateless nation* (London: Routledge, 1992), pg. 189.

'rip it up and start again' model suggested by Craig and others during the '90s, where past critical texts, ideas and practitioners are referred to only to be symbolically defenestrated in the present should not be adopted. Rather, Scottish cinema's post-1990 critical component, following the example of its filmmaking counterpart, needs to find a way of engaging with, rather than abandoning, a perceivedly problematic past.

Ironically, the terms of Craig's absolute latter-day recantation of the *Scotch Reels* project also provide a convincing rationale for qualifying his own view. His damascene conversion regarding the use-value of *Scotch Reels* was part of a far more wide-ranging, ambitious and extremely influential project to understand the development of twentieth-century Scottish cultural criticism. Within Craig's analysis, the despairing, dyspeptic conclusions reached by *Scotch Reels* in the early '80s were microcosmic symptoms of a macrocosmic twentieth century intellectual crisis of confidence. This crisis peaked, and was subsequently overcome, in the years around the abortive Devolution referendum of 1979 and the national cultural renaissance which flourished in the two decades afterwards. Craig argues that successive generations of twentieth century Scottish intellectuals were self-defeatingly dismissive of the cultural heritage and achievement of their own nation, producing a succession of analyses that variously proposed the necessity, or impossibility (or at their most perverse, both) of Scottish culture inventing itself completely anew: "[twentieth-century] cultural nationalism was founded not on the assertion but on the denial of the value of the Scottish past".¹⁰⁸ From the perspective of the hegemonic self-hatred that Craig argues predominated amongst the modern national intelligentsia (and within which *Scotch Reels* was incorporated),

Instead of continuity, what Scottish culture presents... is erasure: each stage of development wipes out what went before it and destroys the very possibility of continuity upon which tradition is founded... The constant erasure of one Scotland by another makes Scotland unrelatable, un-narratable: past Scotlands are not

¹⁰⁸ Cairns Craig, 'Constituting Scotland', in *The Irish Review*, n. 28 (Winter 2001), pg .7 My insert.

gathered into the being of modern Scotland; they are abolished.¹⁰⁹

While I do possess the space to engage fully with this ambitious critique, I do wish to note, however, that Craig's *absolute* rejection of the *Scotch Reels* project seems dangerously close to partaking of the very sins he ascribes to both it and much other twentieth-century cultural thought, namely, an instinctual contemporary recourse towards neat erasure of, rather than testing engagement with, perceivedly problematic areas of past Scottish cultural production and thought.

Instead of performing an act of critical erasure, therefore, I propose instead for the rest of this chapter to identify certain key themes and concerns (and the development of these) running through the fragmentary, apparently self-cancelling body of literature that constitutes Scottish film criticism post-*Scotch Reels*, and to locate my own position within these. In so doing, I wish neither to construct an exhaustive recuperation (to critically stand out) nor denigration (to critically blend in) of the *Scotch Reels* project. Instead, my aim is to apprehend Scottish cinema criticism as an area of local cultural production characterised by an evolving native tradition, however fragile, rather than one overshadowed by the baleful spectre of a barren and largely unusable indigenous past. With regards to locally specific generic and narrative traditions, Thomas Elsaesser argues that, "a strong national cinema must feed on its predecessors and thus stand in a vampiric relation to what has gone before".¹¹⁰ The structure of, and points raised by, my discussion of Scottish film criticism is dictated by a belief that this contention applies equally to intellectual and creative spheres of film practice. The central themes of Scottish cinema criticism first established by *Scotch Reels* and identified and discussed further below are as follows:

¹⁰⁹ Cairns Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination* (Edinburgh: EUP, 1999), pp. 19; 21.

¹¹⁰ Thomas Elsaesser, 'Images for Sale: The 'New' British Cinema', in Lester Friedman (ed.), *British Cinema and Thatcherism: Fires Were Started* (London: UCL Press, 1993), pg. 60.

- The narrative characteristics of historically dominant cinematic representations of 'Scotland' and 'Scottishness'
- The industrial dominance of American, and to a lesser degree, British metropolitan, cinemas in representing Scotland on screen
- The consequent 'oppression' of Scottish society in terms of its popular cultural 'colonisation', and the health of Scottish cinema as a barometer for that of Scottish national culture as a whole

In other words, I trace the evolution of a series of interlocking critical debates about the nature, provenance and national cultural consequences of celluloid images of 'Scottishness'.

In addition, to further emphasise and reiterate my central point that critique- and production-based work are (or at least should be) closely related, mutually implicated activities within contemporary Scottish film culture, I want to demonstrate the extent to which the critical themes I discuss are directly applicable to probably the best-known film to emerge from 1990s Scotland, *Trainspotting*. That particular film proves useful in this context not simply by virtue of its ubiquity. It also - in yet another demonstration of the contiguous histories of and obstacles facing Scottish film production and criticism alike - occupies a comparable position within the narrative of Scottish cinema's industrial development as does *Scotch Reels* in the evolving critical interrogation of that cinema. *Scotch Reels* and *Trainspotting* were both, after all, groundbreaking local film cultural interventions that initially provoked a flurry of excitement, activity and expectation, but were latterly understood to unhelpfully overshadow, rather than productively inform the work of later practitioners. The terms of the dominant late '90s/early '00s revisionist view of *Trainspotting*'s ultimately overweening status, "the hallowed touchstone of the Scottish film industry... [but also] a spectre we just cannot seem to shake"¹¹¹, directly echo those applied by academic critics of the same period to *Scotch Reels*. Within a film culture defined by its historic marginality, a lack of continuous creative and intellectual

¹¹¹ Bob Flynn, 'Spot the Difference', in *Business A. M.*, (21/6/01), n. pg. ref. (Scottish Screen Information Services Archive).

production dictates the enduring pertinence of Cairns Craig's twenty year-old warning that, because both individual Scottish films and acts of film criticism "cannot assume parameters to the culture", they often in over-ambitious ways "try [or are taken by others] to stand for a whole culture in themselves... tak[ing] a facet of that culture and treat[ing] it as though it were the whole"¹¹².

Theme I: identifying traditions of representation

As outlined above, the emergence of Scottish cinema's academic study with the 1982 publication of the *Scotch Reels* anthology was near-contemporaneous with the then unprecedented burst of feature activity predicated upon the first four features of Bill Forsyth. Influential at this same point in time were the novel (but transient) support of Scottish feature production by certain British broadcasters, Channel 4 (as noted above) but to a lesser extent, also Scottish Television: *Gregory's Girl* (Forsyth, GB, 1981), *A Sense of Freedom* (John Mackenzie, GB, 1980) and *Ill Fares the Land* (Bill Bryden, GB, 1982).¹¹³ This is no mere coincidence. Previous to the early 1980s, a substantial and continually evolving critique of Scottish cinema would have been nigh-impossible, given Scottish cinema history's central constant, the almost total lack of domestic infrastructural and production activity, the non-existence of "the Scottish industry [as] a definable entity"¹¹⁴ in a wider British context. Even within the euphoria of the Forsyth/Channel 4 'breakthrough', local filmmakers remained acutely aware that, "you can't really call it an industry here... there are around half-a-dozen blokes who have been around for ten to fifteen years and who want to make features".¹¹⁵ Thus, from the moment of academic criticism's collective emergence in response to a contemporary peak in Scottish feature production, scholars were at once engaged in the promethean task of manufacturing conceptual bricks from a pitiful amount of indigenous audiovisual straw. The traditional lack and belated advent of native feature production thus had direct

¹¹² Craig, 'Visitors...', op. cit., pg. 8. My inserts.

¹¹³ For a contemporary insider account and explanation of the genesis of *Scotch Reels*, see Colin McArthur, 'Breaking the Signs: 'Scotch Reels' as Cultural Struggle', in *Cencrastus*, n. 7 (Winter 1981/2), pp. 21-25; McArthur, 'Scotch Reels and After', in *Cencrastus*, n. 11 (New Year 1983), pp. 2-3.

¹¹⁴ Rod Allen, 'Has Scotland got a film industry?', in *Broadcast*, n. 847 (2/2/76), pg. 13.

¹¹⁵ Charles Gormley quoted in Colin Vaines, 'Directing debut on own doorstep', in *Screen International*, n. 371 (27/11/82), pg. 11. My insert.

consequences, not simply for the timing, but also for the dominant analytical bent, of an emergent Scottish cinema criticism.

As Michael Walsh notes, the study of national cinemas is often characterised by a critical wish to disseminate prescriptive views for the radical reformation of these cinemas, in both textual/ideological and industrial/organisational terms.¹¹⁶ With direct reference to the case of Scotland, John Caughie usefully makes a parallel point by stressing the dual meanings attached for national cinema scholars to the term 'representation'. These, he argues, are 'figurative' and 'participatory'. The former necessitates attention to the ways in which dominant images of national identity, society and history are constructed within films themselves. The latter requires investigation of the institutional and industrial structures and working conditions that materially facilitate the dominance of such images, by financially privileging certain kinds of 'figurative' national representations over others. The 'participatory' approach to representation, as its label implies, is also concerned to propose and proselytise on behalf of alternative industrial and institutional models through which a more variegated and progressive set of 'figurative' representations might realistically emerge.¹¹⁷

Pace Walsh, the problem facing Scottish film criticism right from its early '80s inception was that indigenous cinema's long-term etiolation had left precious little textual or institutional matter to discuss, let alone reform, in the first place (certainly in comparison to nearly all other European cinemas, for instance). *Pace* Caughie, the solution proposed to this problem was to privilege a predominantly 'figurative' model of Scottish cinema studies. While substantive amounts of indigenous features were lacking, there did exist a very large cinematic and popular cultural corpus of texts produced outwith Scotland (predominantly in Hollywood or London) which represented the nation and its identity to domestic and international audiences. The *Scotch Reels* project therefore argued that the task of identifying hegemonic figurative trends within this critical mass must be the central foundational concern of Scottish film criticism, acting on a contemporarily

¹¹⁶ Michael Walsh, 'National cinema, national imaginary', in *Film History*, Vol. 8. 1 (Spring 1996), pg. 6.

¹¹⁷ Caughie, 'Representing Scotland', op. cit., pp. 13-14.

expressed “profound sense of unease about the way Scotland and the Scots have been and are represented in film and television... [and] the lack of analysis of this problem”.¹¹⁸

Granted, an enthusiastic engagement in public debate around ‘participatory’ aspects of Scotland’s cinematic representation was simultaneously prosecuted, particularly around the question of domestic institutional commitment to and concomitant financial support of film and video workshops.¹¹⁹ Moreover, the original *Scotch Reels* volume (although not the wider critical project it subsequently spawned) was in fact dominated by explorations of Scotland’s fragmented history of cinematic representation in the ‘participatory’ sense.¹²⁰ However, these lines of enquiry quickly became adjuncts to the central thrust of the *Scotch Reels* project (perhaps inevitably, given the relative paucity of historic or contemporary activity to explore). Symptomatically, as quickly as the year after the publication of *Scotch Reels*, one of its contributors, John Caughie, was already worrying about the wider critical project’s tendency towards a repetitive framing of Scotland’s cinematic ‘representation’ in one-sidedly ‘figurative’ terms, and the consequent

space which the ‘Scotch Reels’ event failed to open... the concrete context of localized but immediate problems actually experienced by programme-makers and film-makers... think[ing] about these questions as questions of representation and culture and, simultaneously, as questions of institutions, funding and selling.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ McArthur, ‘Scotch Reels and After’, op. cit., pg. 2.

¹¹⁹ See, for example, the lengthy public exchange of views between Colin McArthur and the Scottish Film Council’s John Brown on the Workshop question during 1982-83: McArthur, ‘How to spend £80 000 on film-making’, in *The Herald*, (13/7/82), pg. 4; Brown, ‘Film industry needs whizz kids too’, in *The Herald*, (20/7/82), pg. 4; McArthur, ‘Letter: financial objections’, in *The Herald*, (22/7/82), pg. 8; McArthur, ‘Letter: Cold facts on film-making’, in *The Herald*, (23/8/82), pg. 8; McArthur, ‘Cinema needed to represent truly the Scottish people’, in *The Herald*, (3/11/82), pg. 8; Brown, ‘Letter’, in *Cencrastus*, n. 12, op. cit.; Brown, ‘Letter’, in *Cencrastus*, n. 14 (Autumn 1983), pp. 47-48.

¹²⁰ See, for example, all the following essays from McArthur (ed.) op. cit.: Colin McArthur, ‘Scotland and Cinema: The Iniquity of the Fathers’, pp. 40-69; Jim Hickey, ‘Scottish Film Culture: A Chronicle’, pp. 70-72; John Caughie & Colin McArthur, ‘An Interview with Forsyth Hardy’, pp. 73-92; Douglas Allen, ‘Worker’s Films: Scotland’s Hidden Film Culture’, pp. 93-99; John Hill, “‘Scotland doesna mean much tae Glesca’: Some notes on *The Gorbals Story*”, pp. 100-111.

¹²¹ Caughie, ‘From ‘Scotch Reels’ to the ‘Highland Fling’, op. cit., pg. 40.

Certainly, it is Scotch Reels' prioritisation of a 'figurative' approach to the question of Scotland's cinematic representation within international film production and consumption that remains its best-known, most frequently debated legacy.

In this regard, a triumvirate of cultural discourses and representational models were identified by the Scotch Reels analysis as allegedly holding absolute hegemonic sway over nearly all films that purported to represent Scotland. These discourses were labelled 'Tartanry', 'Kailyard' and 'Clydesideism'.¹²² Tartanry constructs a regional, Highland iconography held sufficient to encompass Scottish national identity as a whole. It is characteristically focused on the highly (R)omanticised portrayal of historical events and personages dating from the first half of the eighteenth century, specifically, the two abortive Jacobite rebellions of 1715 and 1745. These uprisings attempted to restore the deposed Roman Catholic, Scottish descended Stuart dynasty to the British throne, with the Stuarts' attendant promise to dissolve the 1707 Union of Parliaments, through which Scotland had ceased to exist as a politically independent nation state. The national identity that Tartanry constructs is typically pre-Modern, pre-British and tribal, Sir Walter Scott's 'stern Caledonia', a 'land of the mountain and the flood' peopled near-exclusively by Noble Savages.

Kailyard is less geographically and historically specific than Tartanry, though its classical manifestation is a late nineteenth-century, rural Lowland narrative mode. It is concerned with the comic satirisation, valorisation (or both simultaneously) of intensely parochial communities and worldviews projected onto national identity as a whole. Where the classical variant of Kailyard refers to issues of wider historical context at all, it is primarily to the impact of now largely arcane theological differences that motivated the 1843 Disruption of the Church of Scotland, when that body split into two rival Presbyterian national churches.

¹²² For the most influential original definitions of this analytical schema, see Craig, 'Myths Against History...' and McArthur, 'Scotland and Cinema...', both *op. cit.*

Finally, Clydesideism is a twentieth-century urban, specifically West Coast or Glasgow-based, representational tradition. Its narratives typically focus upon political conflict in the heavy industrial workplace, especially the massive Clydeside shipbuilding sector of pre-1970s Scotland, or foreground the social and economic pressures faced in contemporary urban working class existence more generally. Given its more contemporary historical and political focus and engagement with issues of class conflict and inequality, for certain Scotch Reels writers, ‘Clydesideism’ as a discursive mode “ha[s] seemed to offer the only real and consistent basis for a Scottish national culture”¹²³ during the twentieth century, and might therefore prove reclaimable by progressively-orientated artists in a way that was not possible with the other two hegemonic discourses.

Scotch Reels’ wholesale organisation of Scotland’s figurative representation into these three traditions has subsequently proved contentious. Many have objected to an allegedly reductive, partial-sighted view of the corpus of films representing Scotland, one shoehorning many films into the Tartanry-Kailyard-Clydeside schema regardless of their individual subtleties and eccentricities, and conveniently ignoring certain others that didn’t fit the model in immediately obvious ways. John Caughie, for example, latterly criticised Scotch Reels’ willingness to construct a taxonomy of figurative representational tropes that privileged a critical desire for structuralist order over a proper acknowledgement of actual complexity and variety in films depicting Scotland, “limiting the scope of the analysis for a more complex representational field”¹²⁴. Thus, if the Scotch Reels school saw the historic field of Scottish cinematic representation as a creatively monotonous, ideologically barren landscape, this was a problem they in part actively *created* for themselves, rather than objectively observed.¹²⁵ The most glaring omission noted from the early ’80s Scotch Reels criticism was the *Childhood Trilogy* (GB, 1972-1979) of writer/director Bill Douglas, which instantiated just the kind of coruscating indigenous critique of the Tartanry, Kailyard and Clydeside myths which Scotch Reels asserted was

¹²³ John Caughie, ‘Scottish television: What would it look like?’, in McArthur (ed), op. cit., pg. 121

¹²⁴ Caughie, ‘Representing Scotland’, op. cit., pg. 19.

¹²⁵ See, in this regard, Colin McArthur’s recent, nuanced return to a number of late ’40s/early ’50s films he originally located within the Tartanry and Kailyard templates: McArthur, *Brigadoon, Braveheart and the Scots: Distortions of Scotland in Hollywood Cinema* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2003); McArthur, Colin, *Whisky Galore! & The Maggie* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2003).

definitively lacking within Scottish film culture past or present.¹²⁶ Alternatively, many argue that while the Tartanry-Kailyard-Clydeside triumvirate *might* have been *broadly* applicable to the circumstances of the early '80s, a steadily growing Scottish production sector now entails that "questions of representation have to be asked in a more complex way than when, [during the Scotch Reels moment] Scottish cinema could be simplified, abstracted and categorised in critical and historical research".¹²⁷

My own preferred approach to 1990s Scottish cinema positions itself in these debates in the following ways. Most obviously, I am indebted to the Scotch Reels approach in that I too attempt to understand cinematic representations of Scotland over a particular period by organising the available body of indigenous features in a quasi-structuralist manner, privileging two overarching strands, the 'Scottish Independent' and 'Scottish Classical' cycles identified in my introduction. While the expansion of Scottish film production since 1982 may indeed call the use-value of the Tartanry-Kailyard-Clydeside taxonomy into *specific* question, the general strategy of structuring critique around a carefully delimited number of coherent trends in the figurative representation of Scottishness discernable across different films and/or periods still seems to me an attractive one. It offers, as it did in the early '80s, a way of creating a critical mass of cultural artifacts for detailed study and careful generalisation; the alternative involves making inevitably over-determined, speculative claims from close reading of the small clutches of contemporaneous movies that comprise 'Scottish cinema' at any given moment. It must be remembered that, despite the genuinely laudable achievements of the '90s and early '00s, Scotland's is a comparatively under-developed film industry. Between 1972 and 2002, a mere 44 features with significant elements of both Scottish theme and creative, production and/or financial input received some kind of distribution in British cinemas. This constitutes an average of a film-and-a-half per year for the period.¹²⁸ By contrast,

¹²⁶ See Andrew Noble, 'Bill Douglas's Trilogy', in Dick (ed.), op. cit., pg. 149; Andrew O'Hagan, 'Homing', in Eddie Dick, Andrew Noble & Duncan Petrie (eds.), *Bill Douglas: A Lanternist's Account* (London: BFI, 1993), pp. 213-216.

¹²⁷ Caughie, 'Representing Scotland', op. cit., pg. 13. My insert.

¹²⁸ The figure is derived from data contained in Janet McBain, 'Scotland in Feature Film: a Filmography', in Dick (ed.), op. cit., pp. 233-253 and Petrie, *Screening Scotland*, op. cit., pp. 227-8. It also includes three Scottish features released during 2002: *The Magdalene Sisters*, *Morvern Callar* (Lynne Ramsay, GB/Can, 2002) and *Sweet Sixteen*.

within Irish cinema - sometimes compared to its Scottish counterpart in terms of the extraordinary industrial marginalisation perceivedly endured by both - between 1993 and 2003, 76 indigenous or Irish-themed features were produced and domestically distributed with support from the reconstituted Irish Film Board.¹²⁹ The comparison serves to re-emphasise Scotland's still-remarkable industrial marginality, despite the achievements of the 1990s. It also indicates the extent to which Scotch Reels' strategy of identifying and critiquing representational traditions developed and reiterated over an extended period of time remains a potentially productive one for contemporary scholars.

Moreover, there remains a significant degree of mileage in the particular terms of the Tartanry-Kailyard-Clydeside schema for consideration of the 1990s. *Rob Roy*, for example, is easily readable as a vivid example of contemporary Tartanry, with its combined strands of epic romance and honourable indigenous resistance to imported modernity. Perhaps less obviously, there is also the example of *Trainspotting*. This film was adapted from a celebrated contemporary novel aimed at a youth market, performed by a cast of attractive twentysomething local actors, scored with meticulously chosen classic '70s rock and contemporary British dance music and suffused in a deliberately provocative narcotic chic. Most critical response to *Trainspotting* has therefore quite understandably proposed a desire to be utterly 'contemporary' as the film's structuring urge. Typically, Duncan Petrie proposes that *Trainspotting* produced "images of contemporary Scotland [that] had little direct connections with established cinematic or televisual traditions".¹³⁰ Indeed, several writers proposed the symbolic appositeness of the contemporaneous UK theatrical releases of *Trainspotting* and *Sense and Sensibility* (Ang Lee, USA/GB, 1995), "exemplary illustrations of the dominant strands of current British cinema".¹³¹ These 'strands' were held to be distinguishable from each other in terms of nationality, the "scabrously, but comically Scottish" in counterpoint to the

¹²⁹ The figure for Ireland is cited in Irish Film Centre, *New Irish Cinema 1993-2003, 5-17 April 2003, Special Programme*; see also Kevin Rockett, *Ten Years After: the Irish Film Board 1993 - 2003* (Dublin: Bord Scannán na hÉireann, 2003).

¹³⁰ Petrie, *Screening...*, op. cit., pg. 196.

¹³¹ Sarah Street, *British National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1997), pg. 110.

“delightfully, if ironically English”¹³², but also with regards to chronology. *Trainspotting* representing the national ‘now’ in terms of narrative content and aesthetic style; *Sense and Sensibility* not only depicted the national past, historical and literary, it also formed part of that past itself, being as it was an example of the established ‘heritage’ tradition of British cinema.

However, *Trainspotting*, despite its epidermal modishness, can in many ways be read as a modern-day example of the venerable Scottish heritage tradition of Tartanry. The film’s hallucinogenic, deliberately non-naturalistic colour palate recalls the Highland historical epic’s exuberant visual excess; the derelict suburban Edinburgh housing schemes containing the junkies’ dens constitute a socially and culturally remote landscape (no-one is ever seen on the streets) comparable to the Highland wildernesses typically foregrounded by Tartanry. In addition, Renton and his tribe of fellow addicts are in many ways presented as Scottish primitives who have consciously rejected the blandishments of modernity consensually accepted elsewhere (the “life” he “chose not to choose” as his celebrated opening voiceover puts it). This is so in pursuit of narcotic abandon, rather than in defence of the Divine Right of Kings. Moreover, as in the Tartanry paradigm, this local rebellion is understood to be essentially, even quaintly, outmoded, even within the painfully hip subcultural terms of reference it sets itself. As the 1980s give way to the ‘90s, schoolgirl Diane patiently explains to Renton, “the world’s changing, music is changing; even drugs are changing: you can’t stay in here dreaming all day of heroin and Ziggy [sic] Pop”. Renton’s voiceover concedes that, “she was right: I had to find something new”, and the narrative immediately relocates to London to follow his metropolitan adventures as an estate agent during the late ‘80s property boom. Edinburgh-Scotland-council flat-heroin-Bowie/Iggy-the past-‘something old’ gives way to London-England-private property-ecstasy-Acid House-the present-‘something new’. In his subsequent north/south train and bus journeys between London and Edinburgh,

¹³² John Caughie with Kevin Rockett, *The Companion to British and Irish Cinema* (London: Cassell/BFI, 1996), pg. iii. See variations on this same point in Derek Paget, ‘Speaking out: the transformations of *Trainspotting*’, in Deborah Cartmell & Imelda Whelehan (eds.), *From text to screen, screen to text* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 128-140; Moya Lockett, ‘Image and Nation in 1990s British Cinema’, in Robert Murphy (ed.), *British Cinema of the ‘90s* (London: BFI, 2000), pp. 88-99; Karen Lury, ‘Here and Then: Space, Place and Nostalgia in British Youth Cinema of the 1990s’, in *ibid*, pp. 100-108.

Renton appears less a fashionably post-modern peripatetic and more a reincarnation of Frank Osbaldistone, the hero of one of Tartanry's foundational literary texts, Sir Walter Scott's novel *Rob Roy* (1817). For Renton, as for Frank, to traverse the Scotland/England border is not simply to move from one country and national culture to another; it is to locate from a past form of societal organisation and values to their contemporary successors. It is, therefore, perhaps unwise to draw Manichean distinctions between the national spheres respectively inhabited by Renton - "a Scotland that has hitherto been without existence for filmgoers" - and Rob Roy in his 1995 cinematic incarnation - "a place called Scotland... which ha[s] nothing to do with the lives being lived in that country".¹³³ Despite initial appearances, *Trainspotting* in many ways points more towards the remarkable evolutionary flexibility of the Tartanry paradigm than to the advent of a 'post-Tartan' contemporary Scottish cinema unmarked by the historic representational traditions identified in *Scotch Reels*.

That said, in contradistinction to the Scotch Reels triumvirate model, I do not claim that consideration of the two '90s figurative trends foregrounded here offers a definitive or exhaustive account of Scottish cinema in that period. One potential difficulty of corraling groups of films and filmmakers within a shared 'national' frame of reference is that the strategy might peremptorily accede to, rather than question, one of nationalist discourses' most dubious impulses, their aggressive will to homogenise and repress difference in the name of collective unity, "a constant struggle to transform the facts of dispersal, variegation and homelessness into the experience of rooted community."¹³⁴ Something like this accusation could, for example, be laid at the door of Scotch Reels with significant justification. I do not argue that the 'Scottish-American' strand of institutional and creative activity in '90s Scotland is 'all there was' in the period; it is of especial significance, however, in that it contributed to a great degree, part-consciously, part-accidentally, to the creation of the material conditions in which other, 'variegated' kinds of Scottish representations could also be produced. This is another key reason for preferring the 'Scottish-American' definition of '90s Scottish cinema to the established

¹³³ Andrew O'Hagan, 'The Boys are Back in Town', in *Sight & Sound*, Vol. 6. 2 (Feb 1996), pg. 8.

¹³⁴ Andrew Higson, 'The limiting imagination of national cinema', in Hjort & Mackenzie (eds.), op. cit., pg. 65.

‘European Art’ one noted in the preceding introduction. The investigation and celebration of aesthetic and political complexity in particularly distinguished contemporary works such as *Ratcatcher* and *Orphans* is an important critical task. Yet it does not necessarily cast light on the material developments that enabled indigenous feature work to be produced in unprecedented amounts during the decade in the first place. To do that, apparently unappetising consideration of little-known ‘Scottish-American’ commercial and critical ‘failures’ such as *The Near Room* or *Late Night Shopping* is necessary, as chapters 4 and 5 will demonstrate. In contrast to critical orthodoxies past (Scotch Reels) and present, this work prioritises an understanding of the shifting material conditions in which a still industrially marginal Scottish cinema can emerge and survive, rather than a magisterial pronouncement of the ‘true’, or most culturally desirable, nature of that cinema.

Theme II: assessing external influence

As noted above, the founding texts of academic Scottish film criticism circumvented the stubborn lack of indigenous cinematic achievement up to the early 1980s by concentrating their attention upon an analysis of dominant trends in Scotland’s figurative representation within popular cinema more generally. However, the fact that coherent, historically pervasive images of ‘Scotland’ and ‘Scottishness’ could be thus perceived, despite the absence of an indigenous industrial base responsible for the production of these, begged a second, inescapable question: who had produced these images, if not Scots themselves?

The answer was that the “most enduring cinematic representations” of Scotland were “the work of outsiders”¹³⁵, predominantly filmmakers and production companies working within British metropolitan or American cinema traditions and industries. Writing in 1976, David Bruce pre-empted one of the Scotch Reels project’s central contentions, arguing that film, both as an expressive medium and as a viable process of industrial manufacture, was not “something that belonged here [in Scotland] [...] one that always

¹³⁵ John Hill, ‘Introduction’, in Hill, McLoone & Hainsworth (eds.), op. cit., pg. 3.

had to be imported as a finished, packaged article”¹³⁶ from other national cultures and cinemas. The argument went that key Hollywood images of Scotland, such as *Brigadoon* (Vincente Minnelli, USA, 1954), and their British metropolitan counterparts, films like *The Maggie* (Alexander Mackendrick, GB, 1953), operating within the Tartanry-Kailyard-Clydeside schema, constructed and reiterated archetypal oppositions between traumatised American or British Modernity and its sanguine, quasi-feudal Celtic precursor. The history of Scottish cinema was, in both Caughie’s ‘figurative’ and ‘participatory’ senses, therefore originally theorised as one in which “we can put together a picture of a people losing control of their film representation from the word go”.¹³⁷ Therefore, in Scotland, as with the case of its close neighbour, Ireland,

The absence of a local film production industry for most of the twentieth century means that if we are to talk of a national cinema, or a national film text even, we have to engage in a series of acts of creative bricolage; that is to see how an image of [nation] on screen emerged out of the national industries of other countries.¹³⁸

This important theme of Scottish cinema studies influences my own approach to the nation’s 1990s cinema considerably. Again, this is so in ways which ultimately stress that the challenges facing, and strategies adopted by, Scottish filmmakers and critics in the face of long-term industrial marginality are closely related.

Developing the long-established idea of hegemonic American and British metropolitan influence upon cinematic representations of Scotland, it is my already-stated contention that during the ’90s, many local creative personnel performed ‘acts of bricolage’ comparable to those traditionally incumbent upon critics. This was a collective attempt to produce, not simply internationally marketable images of ‘Scottishness’, but also the

¹³⁶ David Bruce, ‘Feature Film-making: Realities and Prospects’, in *The Scottish Review*, Vol. 1 n. 4 (Autumn 1976), pg. 40. My insert.

¹³⁷ Alastair Michie, ‘Scotland: Strategies of Centralisation’, in Charles Barr (ed.), *All Our Yesterdays: 90 Years of British Cinema* (London: BFI, 1986), pg. 253.

¹³⁸ Ruth Barton, *Irish National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2004), pg. 4.

basis for a sustainable indigenous production sector. The structuring terms of both these things 'emerged out of the national industries of other countries'. Moreover, just as a Scottish 'national film text' necessarily develops out of the already existing practices and legacies of other national (film) cultures, so too does a Scottish 'national film critical text'. In other words, whatever methodological approaches and models different local critics adopt in order to interrogate Scottish cinema, many of these will, by definition, originally have been developed within study of other national film cultures, ones active over the long historical period that Scottish cinema was posted 'absent'.

Similar sets of questions therefore need to be asked, not simply of externally produced representations of Scotland, but also of the critical tools imported to interrogate the former. If, as the Scotch Reels school argued, many (if not most) American- and British-produced images of Scotland were ideologically problematic because, by virtue of their cultural origin, they "fitted the needs of others rather than the needs of Scots"¹³⁹, then a similar problem potentially applies to the analytical tools used by successive generations of critics to interrogate Scottish cinema, a return to McArthur's contention this chapter opened with, namely, his point that film critical acts are no more 'innocent' than filmmaking ones. With regards to the British film industrial and critical contexts, I outline below my own preferred understanding of '90s Scottish cinema's place within UK-wide debates and developments, especially discussion around whether cinema from the British Islands is appropriately approached in terms of its national specificity. Once again, I use *Trainspotting* as an illustrative case study. Before considering the question of the film's complex and contested status as a 'Scottish' and/or 'British' film, however, I wish to remark on its representative engagement with American cinematic precedents and popular cultural discourses. This allows me to consider the appropriateness of applying certain established British and European critical responses to American cinema to discussion of *Trainspotting*, and by extension, the 1990s Scottish cinema the film is often employed as a synecdoche for.

¹³⁹ Colin McArthur, 'Tendencies in the New Scottish Cinema', in *Cencrastus*, n. 13 (Summer 1983), pg. 33.

Murray Smith argues that *Trainspotting*'s famous opening sequence, in which the Scots accent of Ewan McGregor's Mark Renton ("Choose life. Choose a job. Choose a career") plays in counterpoint with the iconic, instantly recognisable, American drawl of Iggy Pop's 'Lust for Life', emerges from, and is emblematic of, "the complex inter- and intra-national dynamics of contemporary movie culture... for all its 'Scottishness', the impact and appeal of America - its glamour and vitality - is everywhere in *Trainspotting*".¹⁴⁰ However, the film's closing sequence indicates the extent to which the domestically felt resonance of such 'glamour' provokes not a local attitude of wide-eyed quiescence, but one of aggressively self-confident appropriation. This is so not simply on the part of Renton within *Trainspotting*'s fictional diegesis, but also on the part of the film's makers working within the material context of mid '90s Scottish and British production sectors. After escaping from his erstwhile friends armed with £12 000, the stolen proceeds of a heroin deal, Renton's final narrative act, crossing a bridge in central London, represents embarkation upon both subjective, diegetic and literal, extra-diegetic journeys. Walking towards the camera, his image expands and distorts immediately before the final credits roll, as Renton's simultaneous voiceover announces to the watching audience that he has renounced both old acquaintances and heroin for good, "cleaning up... moving on", ironically enough, "to be just like you: the job, the family, the fucking big television, the washing machine, the car". The geographic and cultural location of the watching audience, the collective 'you' that Renton (and his creators) address is international in scale, and more specifically, transatlantic in nature. For one thing, Renton's entrepreneurial self-reinvention has "a deep resonance with the American dream".¹⁴¹ Moreover, "gliding into bourgeois-induced, rather than drug-initiated, oblivion",¹⁴² he appears on the surface to be yet another willing European convert to an interlocking set of imported American ideological values and tradable goods that encompass, but also extend far beyond, the realm of the cinematic. As Geoffrey Nowell-Smith notes, a fear that "the enjoyment of American culture-goods leads inexorably to the consumption of other American goods, or goods marketed by American companies, such as MacDonald's

¹⁴⁰ Murray Smith, *Trainspotting* (London: BFI, 2002), pp. 18-19.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, pg. 19.

¹⁴² Bert Cardullo, 'Fiction into Film, or, Bringing Welsh to a Boyle', in *Literature/Film Quarterly*, Vol. 25. 3 (1997), pg. 162.

hamburgers”¹⁴³ represents the most historically persistent keynote of decades-old European hostility to American (or more accurately, Hollywood) film culture and the subsequent call for the active protection of culturally (and often, linguistically) distinctive national cinema.

This long-term critical understanding of enthusiastic local engagements, whether on the part of filmmakers or film audiences, with American cinema as equivalent to taking credulous receipt of a consumerist Trojan Horse was apparent in certain contemporary responses to *Trainspotting*. The film’s detractors complained that, in aesthetic and thematic senses, it exemplified popular American cinema’s naked economic function as ‘shop window’:

Trainspotting spends far too much time with its nose pressed up against the glass of American cinema, desperate for a piece of the action, but merely fogging up the screen with longing.¹⁴⁴

Yet this seems an overly simplistic version of the way in which different national cultures relate to each other. It is as if, in order to preserve some kind of fundamental authenticity and integrity, each were as hermetically sealed off from the others’ ideological and stylistic influences as the notion of being fixed ‘behind glass’ would imply. Renton’s apparent self-conversion to globalised consumer values, for example, is in fact as ambivalent as many of his other professed allegiances and actions throughout *Trainspotting*’s narrative. His closing monologue constitutes an implicit and ironic local challenge to a purportedly universal set of values and identities. How legitimate is a socio-political creed that ultimately proves readily acceptable to a character whose personal values are, at very best, morally relativist in the extreme?¹⁴⁵ Renton’s ostensibly enthusiastic championing of the mantra of globalised consumerism instantiates the fact

¹⁴³ Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, ‘Introduction’, in Nowell-Smith & Steven Ricci (eds.), *Hollywood & Europe: Economics, Culture, National Identity 1945-95* (London: BFI/UCLA Film and Television Archive, 1998), pg. 2.

¹⁴⁴ Tom Shone, ‘Needle Match’, in *The Sunday Times*, (25/2/96), Section 10, pg. 5.

¹⁴⁵ Cardullo, op. cit., pg. 160.

that such discourses can be ideologically subverted, as well as acquiesced in, at local level.

Analogously, *Trainspotting* proved an unprecedented Scottish industrial success, self-consciously crafted by its makers to give a marketable, because locally distinctive, inflection to the 'you' of mainstream commercial film production. The film grossed \$12m in its first eight weeks of commercial exhibition in North American cinemas, and its estimated global gross of \$72m from theatrical exhibition made it the world's most profitable film of 1996, when calculation is made through a ratio of original production costs against eventual box office receipts.¹⁴⁶ This was a significant material analogue to the fictional success of Renton's quest to infiltrate a highly capitalised, global consumer culture from the unpromising starting point of a regionally specific, endemically deprived equivalent. Renton's new-found, challenging determination to consume economically whilst deconstructing ideologically was paralleled by his makers' new-found ability to produce, and therefore profit from, an avowedly commercial, yet culturally hybrid, form of contemporary Scottish and British cinema. In the case of *Trainspotting*, and the 1990s Scottish cinema it stands in emblematic relationship to, the apparently impermeable 'shop window' corralling local film cultures and identities from their hegemonic American superiors proved to some extent traversable, in ideologically and industrially profitable ways. *Trainspotting* as both an important 'figurative' and 'participatory' representation of Scotland did not exemplify nor precipitate a one-dimensional 'Americanisation' of contemporary Scottish film and national cultures. Rather, it highlighted a multifaceted process of cultural exchange between local, peripheral and global, dominant filmmaking traditions and identities that facilitated positive economic and cultural transformations within the former.

However, the encounter between traditionally peripheral and core national cultures, identities and cinemas discernible within *Trainspotting* does not proceed along an exclusively 'Scottish-American' axis. Other critics have approached this film in terms of

¹⁴⁶ Sarah Street, 'Trainspotting', in Jill Forbes & Sarah Street (eds.), *European Cinema: An Introduction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), pg. 183.

its complex place within identifiably *British* cinematic and societal traditions and contexts. Bert Cardullo, focusing on the film's preoccupation with the minutiae of contemporary British youth and music cultures, locates *Trainspotting* in a 'British youth' cycle originating in the early '60s collaborations between Richard Lester and The Beatles - *A Hard Day's Night* (GB, 1964), *Help!* (GB, 1965) - films which, as he notes, *Trainspotting* self-consciously quotes during its London sequences.¹⁴⁷ Murray Smith proposes the film's "spiritual kinship"¹⁴⁸ with the contemporaneous Young British Art movement centred around Damien Hirst. Claire Monk locates *Trainspotting* within a contemporary British cinematic movement which she labels the '90s underclass film, "a notable cycle of British films that drew their subject... from the problems of unemployment and social exclusion faced by a [particular] social stratum".¹⁴⁹ Ewa Mazierska and Laura Rascaroli argue that the film version of *Trainspotting* is deliberately placeless, systematically evacuating the detailed references to Edinburgh life, culture and geography that abound in Irvine Welsh's source novel: "paradoxically, although only a fraction of [the] film is set in London, we see many more of London's well-known landmarks than we do Edinburgh's".¹⁵⁰ For Duncan Petrie, such considerations "confirmed [*Trainspotting*'s] status as a 'British' cultural product as opposed to the more narrowly conceived Scottish frame of reference defining Irvine Welsh's original novel".¹⁵¹

Moreover, in industrial and institutional terms, *Trainspotting*'s avowed 'Scottishness' might appear very tenuous indeed. In the wake of *Shallow Grave*'s notable international commercial and critical success, David Aukin, Commissioning Editor for Drama at Channel 4, took a then-unprecedented decision to fund *Trainspotting*'s £1.7m production budget in full, the broadcaster's largest single investment in a single feature project at

¹⁴⁷ See Cardullo, op. cit.

¹⁴⁸ Smith, *Trainspotting*, op. cit., gg. 14.

¹⁴⁹ Claire Monk, 'Underbelly UK: The 1990s underclass film, masculinity and ideologies of the 'new' Britain', in Justine Ashby & Andrew Higson (eds.), *British Cinema, Past and Present* (London: Routledge, 2000), pg. 274.

¹⁵⁰ Ewa Mazierska & Laura Rascaroli, 'Escape from a Celtic City', in Mazierska & Rascaroli, *From Moscow to Madrid: Postmodern Cities, European Cities* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2003), pg. 203.

¹⁵¹ Duncan Petrie, *Contemporary Scottish Fictions: Film, Television and the Novel* (Edinburgh: EUP, 2004), pg. 103.

that date. Figment Films, the independent production company run by the creative team behind *Trainspotting* was London-based. Tellingly, Peter Mullan, who acted in the film, later acknowledged its centrality for '90s Scottish film culture, but presented *Trainspotting* as an intervention made from without, not within, that culture itself: "the two most important directors in Scotland in the past 15 years have both been English, Danny Boyle and Ken Loach. They were the ones who let us out of the cage".¹⁵² Such considerations of shared social and cultural heritage and pronounced Scottish creative reliance on metropolitan financial patronage throughout the '90s perhaps explain Duncan Petrie's classification of Scotland "in terms of a devolved British cinema rather than [a] fully independent entity".¹⁵³ Be that as it may, this still behoves criticism to outline the precise limits, nature and consequences of this centripetal movement of financial and cultural capital out from British cinema's traditional metropolitan heartland. Broadly speaking, two critical approaches to post-1990 Scottish cinema's relationship to the contemporary British 'whole' have developed, which might be labelled in terms of competing 'preservation' and 'disintegration' theses.

Within the 'preservation' thesis, the emergence of Scottish cinema in the last years of the twentieth century (not to mention that cinema's Welsh and Northern Irish counterparts) is taken to actually strengthen the case for discussing film cultures within the Atlantic archipelago in terms of a shared British identity and cultural heritage. In what looks like a methodological analogue of the Unionist rationale for political devolution in Scotland, the rise of non-English film cultural and industrial bases within the UK does not preface the disintegration of an overarching British 'parent'. Such developments are in fact taken to preclude, not precipitate, break-up. Contemporary British cinema (not to mention academic British cinema studies) become stronger, because more inclusive, rather than weaker, because rapidly disintegrating, entities. In this logic, a work like *Trainspotting* "falls into the category of British films that seek to challenge dominant notions of 'Britishness'".¹⁵⁴ The fundamental significance of a recent British cinema unable "to

¹⁵² Simon Hattenstone, 'Interview with Peter Mullan' (4/11/03), @ <http://www.film.guardian.co.uk/print/0,3858,4795691-101730,00.html> <accessed 10/11/03>

¹⁵³ Petrie, *Screening Scotland*, op. cit., pg. 186.

¹⁵⁴ Street, 'Trainspotting', op. cit., pg. 183.

assert the myths of [a single unitary] 'nation' with its earlier confidence" is that it can therefore "be regarded as representing the complexities of [British] 'national' life more fully than ever before".¹⁵⁵ Many contemporary commentators saw '90s Scottish cinema's 'devolution' from British cinema's established metropolitan centre as representing a reformation of that core. Philip Kemp, for instance, celebrated "the bite and energy currently revitalising British cinema... credit[able] to Celtic actors, writers and directors: Scots especially".¹⁵⁶ For John Hill, the most authoritative advocate of the national cinema model of contemporary British cinema studies, the significance of new Scottish and Welsh cinemas is that they emerge from nations marked by the "peculiar historical circumstances" of economic implication within, but cultural oppression by, the British imperial project and national identity. Their contemporary cultural production is thus believed to "provide an opening for a more complex negotiation of the discourses around the 'national' than English/British cinema has traditionally provided".¹⁵⁷ The problem with this sympathetic line of argument, however, is that it appears to conceive of 'Scottish cinema' as a functional cultural phenomenon. That cinema is not quite important enough to study in itself, but rather, insofar as it services the evolution of a more 'significant' British whole. What is potentially lost here is due consideration of the ways in which Scotland's cinema interacts with, interrogates and transforms existing structures of Scottish culture and identity, as well as their British counterparts.

The conclusions drawn within the 'disintegration' scenario are diametrically opposed to those proposed by the 'preservation' thesis. Here, the rise of a range of different film cultural and industrial bases within the UK is held to be symptomatic of the extent to which cinema, or indeed just about any other form of contemporary cultural production, can no longer speak with confidence, or be taken to do so, on behalf of *any* coherent form of national community and identity, and not simply a unitary British one. To connect and define any group of films and/or filmmakers in terms of a shared national origin is to woefully misunderstand and -represent the realities of identity politics in the present day,

¹⁵⁵ John Hill, *British Cinema in the 1980s: issues and themes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), pg. 241. My inserts.

¹⁵⁶ Philip Kemp, 'New Maps of Albion', in *Film Comment*, Vol. 35.3 (May/June 1999), pg. 64.

¹⁵⁷ John Hill, 'British Cinema as National Cinema: Production, Audience and Representation', in Murphy (ed.) (2001), op. cit., pg. 211.

where previously sustainable nationalist discourses are being steadily overwhelmed by a horde of intra-, inter- and non-national competitors. Andrew Higson, for example, argued in the year of *Shallow Grave*'s production that, "in the present climate" of UK society, the very idea of 'national cinema', whether pan- or intra-British, was antiquated. More critically and creatively profitable were alternative engagements with a range of intra- and international communal experiences and allegiances, "a socialist cinema, or a green cinema, or a feminist cinema"¹⁵⁸, rather than their Scottish, or Northern Irish, or Welsh, or English equivalents.

The troubling irony of this British critical position from a Scottish perspective is, of course, that it proclaims the death of national cinema within the British Islands at exactly the point in time when a variety of non-metropolitan national film cultures and production bases were belatedly but seriously consolidating themselves as culturally and industrially self-sufficient, distinctive entities. During the '90s, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish film cultures to varying degrees laid claim to 'national' status as a rhetorical and political strategy for generating funds and creating infrastructures that could sustain previously lacking continuity and diversity of local audiovisual production. Higson latterly conceded that in "other political circumstances" than "*the* British experience" (conceived here in the singular), "it may be that lobbying or legislating for a national cinema will usefully advance the struggle of a community for cultural, political and economic self-definition."¹⁵⁹ However, the case of '90s Scotland makes it difficult to see the justification for proclaiming a definitive historical shift to a cluster of local British and Irish cinemas that are assumed to be equally and essentially 'post-national' in industrial structure and ideological character. There exist more material experiences and cultural appropriations of 'the national' than just identifiably 'British' or 'English' ones.

This study therefore sets out to explore 1990s Scottish cinema without an *a priori* assumption that the conclusions drawn about this object of study must necessarily or preferably be aligned neatly with any of an already-existing range of prescribed views

¹⁵⁸ Andrew Higson, *Waving the Flag: Constructing a National Cinema in Britain*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pg. 279.

¹⁵⁹ Higson, 'The limiting imagination...', op. cit., pg. 73. My italics.

apprehending a unitary contemporary 'British cinema'. While British film industrial, cultural and critical contexts were undoubtedly influential over, and germane to, aspects of Scottish cinema's development during the '90s, such relationships cannot be conceived as unidirectional entities exclusively controlled, whether industrially or critically, from an English/British centre. Just as 1990s Scottish creative and institutional personnel sought to adapt pre-existing industrial working practices developed with reference to the local circumstances and needs of other national film cultures, so commentary on this place and period needs to make itself comparably selective and strategic in its appropriation of pre-existing critical approaches to British cinema, and questions of national cinema more generally, which were not manufactured with conscious regard to the case of Scotland. The recent emergence of a 'devolved' Scottish cinema necessitates the development of a comparably devolved form of Scottish cinema criticism.

Theme III: (post)colonial rhetoric

The first two traditional themes of Scottish film criticism identified and negotiated the historic status of Scotland's cinema as an anomalous national film culture. As with other national cinemas, a range of coherent figurative traditions within which the nation was represented could clearly be identified; yet unlike most other national cinemas (certainly within European and Anglophone spheres) this filmic corpus had been near-wholly produced outwith Scotland. This lack of fit between the national origins of Scotland's 'figurative' and 'participatory' representations has never been viewed as mere arcane historical curiosity. Rather, successive critics have argued for its marked effect upon the ideological health of contemporary Scottish society. As early as 1938, the documentary film producer and critic John Grierson could be found complaining that, "there is hardly a picture of Scotland but comes by grace of the alien and is false".¹⁶⁰ While the predominant view of the political significance accruing to film representations of Scotland (whether indigenously produced or not) has shifted markedly over the last quarter-century or so, critical debate has mostly taken place within a lexicon established

¹⁶⁰ John Grierson, 'A Scottish Experiment', in Forsyth Hardy (ed.), *Grierson on Documentary* (London: Faber & Faber, 1945), pg. 145.

by the Scotch Reels analysis, that of Scotland's ideological and cultural 'colonisation' (or its belated emergence from this state). This is the third central theme of Scottish film criticism.

It is this theme that also reveals the extent to which, and reasons why, Scotch Reels increasingly came to be seen, from the early '90s on, as an unsuitable basis for a developing Scottish film critical tradition. In brief: the 1980s and early '90s were dominated by despairing diagnoses of Scottish culture's ideological 'colonisation' by more powerful, external loci of cultural, political and economic authority. Specifically, "successive waves of discursive hegemony exercised on Scotland"¹⁶¹ by American and British metropolitan societies and cinemas were detected and castigated during this period. Yet over the last decade or so, a far more optimistic, diffusely 'post-colonial' reading of film and popular cultural stereotypes of 'Scotland', and their potentially radical ideological meanings and use-value for inhabitants of the Scottish sphere, has become increasingly fashionable.

As previously noted, the Scotch Reels analysis identified the historic existence and ubiquity of three cinematic and popular cultural traditions of representing 'Scotland', Tartanry, Kailyard and Clydesideism. However, equally central to that analysis was a diagnosis of these modes' markedly regressive ideological consequences. The Scotch Reels pessimistically contended that the trio shared several major problematic features. They all displayed, for example, an overwhelmingly masculine bias in the identities and cultural values each proposed as recognisably 'Scottish'. More importantly still, their respective narrations of national history and identity are profoundly defeatist: "each of these discourses plays out an epic transformation rendered as loss".¹⁶² Tartanry mourns the eighteenth-century retreat of Highland feudal agrarianism in the face of British mercantile individualism. Kailyard eulogises Scotland's gradual nineteenth-century transformation from a predominantly rural, unified Presbyterian theocracy to a highly

¹⁶¹ Colin McArthur, 'The Scottish Discursive Unconscious', in Alasdair Cameron & Adrienne Scullion (eds.), *Scottish Popular Theatre and Entertainment: historical and critical approaches to theatre and film in Scotland* (Glasgow: Glasgow University Library, 1996), pg. 82.

¹⁶² Caughie, 'Representing Scotland', op. cit., pg. 16.

urbanised, schismatic (rival Protestant churches), sectarian (mass Irish Catholic immigration to the expanding west coast conurbation), and latterly, an increasingly secular national society. Clydesideism is left bereft by the decades-long decimation of early twentieth-century Scotland's status as a global heavy industrial economic power, and its subsequent transformation into a shrunken, increasingly service-based, welfare-dependent national economy largely controlled by external capital. The hegemonic trio were therefore deeply self-negating, "myths of the end of the very culture whose being they are supposed to express".¹⁶³ By definition, Tartanry, Kailyard and Clydesideism could have nothing positive to contribute to contemporary Scottish understandings of national identity as a continuously evolving phenomenon, because what all three proposed in their different ways was that a single, authentic Scottish *ethnos* had been powerless to resist its own definitive extinction in earlier periods of the country's history.

The combined ideological effect of the dominant representational trio was a double-pronged quintessential proposition of 'Scotland' as either collective anomaly or collective tragedy. Somewhere in 'The Wilds of Scotland'TM a perverse conflict between Modernity and Tradition unfolds. Isolated - usually incoming - representatives of the former are trounced or seduced at every turn by an amoral gaggle of - predominantly native - adherents to the latter. This is so notwithstanding diametrically opposed, long-term historical and cultural shifts experienced and acceded to elsewhere in the Occident (Scotland as anomaly). Alternatively, in something like a negative image of the 'anomaly' scenario, isolated native representatives of Tradition stage a heroic, but doomed, last stand against the encroachments of Modernity (Scotland as Tragedy). In both anomalous and tragic imaginings, 'Scotland' is both a place and a mindset definitively out of kilter with Western rationality. In the most significant 1990s development of this aspect of the original Scotch Reels thesis, Colin McArthur labelled that phenomenon "The Scottish Discursive Unconscious"¹⁶⁴, which he argued, "comes into play when anyone seeks to represent Scotland and the Scots in any sign system".¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ Craig, 'Myths Against History', op. cit., pg. 8.

¹⁶⁴ McArthur, 'The Scottish Discursive Unconscious', op. cit., pg. 81.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

The absolute industrial and popular cultural dominance of such static, delusional and depressive representations of 'Scotland' disabled an enabling, confident sense of national community and identity in the present, the *Scotch Reels* analysis argued. Distorted domestic understandings of Scottish history, culture and identity had been incrementally imposed from without in an ideological equivalent of Chinese Water Torture. Generations of Scots had internalised representations of their history and identity manufactured at both a geographic and cultural remove from their own national sphere, ones unable, and indeed blithely unconcerned, to fully reflect the actual complexity of lived experience within Scottish society past or present. This ideation of Scotland's cinematic representation saw the latter as both expressive metaphor for, and influential enabling mechanism of, a stunted modern-day national culture. To deconstruct dominant film representations of Scotland was thus "to peel away successive layers of discursive hegemony exercised on Scotland... [and] articulated outside of Scotland itself".¹⁶⁶ Textual deconstruction was the necessary first step on the road to a radical Scottish cinema, one that would initially be made possible through "a decolonisation of representations of Scotland".¹⁶⁷ The damaging power of such representations, and the extent to which Hollywood and London's cultural and economic power were contributory facets of a much wider, externally directed political and economic hegemony in post-WWII Scotland, were both seen as but the most recent chapter in a much longer colonial national history.

Thus, *Scotch Reels* outlined not simply a provocative, iconoclastic reading of a historically 'colonised' Scottish film culture; the project argued that Scottish culture *per se* should be apprehended in the same way. Put simply, it was impossible to understand "the limitations of Scottish film culture separately from the problems of Scottish culture as a whole".¹⁶⁸ In the late '70s and early '80s, the moment of Scottish cinema criticism's initial emergence, such largely hostile relations to the historic achievements of Scottish culture *en toto* formed the most influential way in which local intellectuals understood the history of their native society. The most important example of, and influence over,

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, pp. 82-3.

¹⁶⁷ Wills, 'New Images of Scotland', op. cit., pg. 42.

¹⁶⁸ McArthur, 'Introduction', op. cit. pg. 1.

that collective position was the Marxist historian Tom Nairn's 1977 monograph *The Break-Up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism*, a work specifically highlighted in the introduction to *Scotch Reels* as one "which has resonances throughout this volume"¹⁶⁹. In *Break-Up*, Nairn famously castigated an irreversibly contaminated Scottish national culture as a "remarkable assemblage of heterogeneous elements, neurotic double-binds, falsely honoured shades and brainless vulgarity".¹⁷⁰

Nairn explained Scotland's 'mutilated' culture with reference to what he saw as the nation's aberrant historical and cultural status in the European context, post-1707. Absorbed within a wider British State (and more slowly, within a wider British national identity) by the 1707 Act of Union, Scotland became junior partner in a lucrative imperial enterprise. However, the unforeseen consequence of this was that the nation peremptorily debarred itself from active participation in the nineteenth-century era of popular nationalist movements and the emergence of new nation states in Continental Europe. Scotland could not '(re-)emerge' at this period because it had previously assented to its own quasi-colonial 'submergence' within Britain. This had profoundly crippling national cultural consequences. Nairn argued that Scotland's unique historical trajectory meant that successive generations of its native intelligentsia were deprived of the "typical 'nationalist' role"¹⁷¹ visible in other European societies, namely, the "revolutionary"¹⁷² creation of new, contemporarily and politically engaged structures of national identity, culture and government which dismantled their quasi-feudal, aristocratic governmental predecessors. In other words, what modern Scotland missed out on was "a 'national culture'... able to express the particular realities of a country, in a romantic manner accessible to growing numbers of the reading public".¹⁷³ Because that had not happened - had not been able to happen - in Scotland, the dominant myths of national identity bequeathed to the present by the past were nostalgic, regressive and disabling, rather than forward-looking and inspiring. Nairn despaired of Tartanry, for example, that it would

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, pg. 1.

¹⁷⁰ Tom Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism, Revised Edition* (London: Verso, 1981), pg. 168.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, pg. 154.

¹⁷² Ibid, pg. 155.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

never “wither away” because “it possesses the force of its own vulgarity – immunity from doubt and higher culture”.¹⁷⁴ Moreover, there was a further cruel irony lurking in the tail of Scotland’s post-1707 trajectory. While the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had offered powerful material compensations for the nation’s cultural obsolescence, through Britain’s emergence as an imperial world power, the story of the twentieth century had proved very different. The terminal decline of Britain’s imperial status had now locked Scotland within the clutches of a geriatric nation state and national identity. Abruptly denied the offsetting compensations for cultural dissolution that it had enjoyed for over two hundred years, modern-day Scotland had no immediately obvious compensatory recourse to ideological tools for national consciousness-raising of the kind manufactured on the Continent the century before.

It is in the light of this contemporarily hegemonic, universalising reading of modern Scottish history and culture that we should read perhaps the best-known single passage in the *Scotch Reels* volume, Colin McArthur’s coruscating denunciation of a Scottish cinema which, unlike its more illustrious European counterparts, had “failed to meet a historical appointment with the discourses of Marxism and Modernism”.¹⁷⁵ Symptomatically, the lines of demarcation between Scottish film and Scottish national culture as a whole become very blurred indeed:

Scotland [my emphasis] has produced no equivalents of Syberberg’s, Bertolucci’s, Angelopoulous’, Alverez’s and Mulloy’s treatments of their respective national histories; no equivalents of Godard’s, Oshima’s or Makavejev’s anatomising of the sexual mores of the societies in which they live; no equivalents of the sustained reflection on the processes of cinema evident in the work of Snow and Straub/Hillet...¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, pg. 165.

¹⁷⁵ McArthur, ‘Scotland and Cinema...’, op. cit., pg. 67.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

The ambiguous, highly suggestive slippage between 'Scottish cinema' and 'Scotland' *per se* both partook of one enduring Scottish critical precedent and established another. On one hand, it drew upon Nairn and the wider twentieth-century tradition of self-lacerating national cultural criticism identified by Cairns Craig. Note, for example, the uncanny degree to which the tenor and syntax of McArthur's rhetoric echoes that of the literary critic and poet Edwin Muir, famously despairing of what he saw as the near-terminal state of Scottish literature in 1936, as opposed to cinema in 1982:

The fact remains that there is no Scottish prose, nothing in Scots to call up any image of the various worlds that occur to mind when one mentions Montaigne, Pascal, Sir Thomas Browne, Voltaire, Rousseau, Swift, Hegel, Schopenhauer, De Quincey, Newman and a hundred other writers.¹⁷⁷

Scotch Reels certainly took part in a generations-long native intellectual tradition which occupied a perverse, mutually lacerative relation to a national culture from which it felt definitively alienated, yet compelled to document in scathing terms. On the other hand, McArthur's arguments created a new precedent, in that to speak of Scottish cinema since has often also been to express a more widely focused sense of hope or despair about the potentialities afforded by modern Scottish cultural and identity as a whole.

Scotch Reels' 'colonial' reading of modern Scottish film and national cultures alike has proved extraordinarily pervasive. It clearly impacts, for example, upon perhaps the best-known utterance from the best-known work (though a combination of its literary and filmic incarnations) of late twentieth century Scottish culture, Renton's howl of despair at the 'shiteness' of 'being Scottish' in *Trainspotting*. Mark explains this fact to his naïve, well-meaning friend Tommy, who has dragged the former and their wider circle of junkie intimates on a walking tour of a decidedly inhospitable looking Highland wilderness, in search of – amongst other things – a positive sense of national identity. Tommy

¹⁷⁷ Edwin Muir, *Scott and Scotland: The predicament of the modern Scottish writer* [1936], (repr. Edinburgh: Polygon, 1982), pg. 73.

bathetically asks, while gesturing towards a stereotypical vista of mountain and flood, “Doesn’t it make you proud to be Scottish?” Mark’s celebrated reply (I quote here the film version) is a virulent ‘no’:

It’s shite being Scottish: we’re the lowest of the low, the scum of the fuckin’ earth, the most wretched, miserable, servile, pathetic trash that was ever shat into civilisation. Some people hate the English. I don’t; they’re just wankers. We, on the other hand, are colonised by wankers; can’t even find a decent culture to be colonised by. We’re ruled by effete arseholes. It’s a shite state of affairs to be in, Tommy, and all the fresh air in the world won’t make any fuckin’ difference.

Renton’s despairing *cri de coeur* claims, much like the rather more soberly expressed critiques of Scotch Reels and Nairn, that a ‘colonised’ modern-day Scotland accords no possibilities for progressive, nurturing individual and collective self-definition to its population. This is so not least because of the pathological, yet historically unalterable, defining characteristics of Scottish national identity and culture, repositories of “the most wretched, servile, miserable, pathetic trash that was ever shat into civilisation”. The essentially subjugate nature and status of Scottish culture will always defy the efforts of successive generations of its constituents to transform or react against it, a futile expenditure of “fresh air” (not to mention ‘hot’). It is precisely this nightmarish vision of Scottish culture and identity’s static ‘colonial’ abjection that reconfirms the headlong rush of Mark and the community of Edinburgh junkies he speaks for, but increasingly despises, into the waiting arms of narcotic oblivion, as “at or around this time, we made a healthy, informed, democratic decision to get back on drugs as soon as possible”.

Yet there is a paradox here. The international commercial and critical success of *Trainspotting* made it something of an advance guard for the 1990s “repertoire of images created by an emerging Scottish cinema represent[ing] a challenge to and an extension of

certain dominant cinematic projections of Scotland and the Scots”¹⁷⁸, the projections through which in part, *Scotch Reels* argued, Scotland had culturally colonised. This phenomenon was contemporarily glossed in 1995 by Eddie Dick, Chief Officer of the Scottish Film Production Fund, as “the change of attitudes here”, driven by a new generation of self-confident Scottish filmmakers “trying to think of stories that will work on an international level”.¹⁷⁹ As Angus Calder noted in the year of *Trainspotting*’s domestic cinema release, through the early achievements of that loose collective project, “enhanced and inflamed pride in Scotland is sustained... by the successes of writers such as Welsh and filmmakers like Boyle”¹⁸⁰, thus contradicting the pessimistic pronouncements of Renton within film and literary texts. Given that fact, the latter’s pessimistic conceptualisation of the quite literally monotonous way in which Scottish culture and identity function starts to ring somewhat hollow. Just as one would be loath to recommend his destructive recreational habits to others, the same goes for the fixed understanding of ‘Scotland’ that Renton proposes in order to justify these.

Trainspotting’s literary and filmic incarnations were commonly interpreted as both material evidence of, and stimulus for, the contemporary existence of just the kind of healthy national culture whose non-existence Renton proclaims. Against and encouraged by this contemporary backdrop, an increasing number of critics rejected the *Scotch Reels* ‘colonisation’ thesis, instead arguing that both Scottish film and national cultures were belatedly entering a ‘postcolonial’ phase.¹⁸¹

Many such ‘90s usages of the postcolonial metaphor applied to Scottish culture, filmic or otherwise, stressed both the necessity *and* increasing actuality of radical, celebratory re-evaluations of what increasingly came to be seen as a ‘victimised’ national-cultural history, traditionally part-critically disparaged, part-critically ignored. Symptomatically, Robert Houston and William Knox began their introduction to a major anthology surveying the entire chronological sweep of Scottish history by quoting the early

¹⁷⁸ Petrie, *Screening Scotland*, op. cit., pg. 1.

¹⁷⁹ Quoted in Allan Hunter, ‘Plaid Influence’, in *Screen International*, n. 1020 (11/8/95), pg. 12.

¹⁸⁰ Angus Calder, ‘By the Water of Leith I sat down and wept: reflections on Scottish Identity’, in Harry Ritchie (ed.), *New Scottish Writing* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996), pg. 230.

¹⁸¹ See, for example, Annie Morgan James, ‘Postcolonial Reflections of Scottish Landscape in cinema’, in G. Rings & R. Morgan-Tamosunas (eds.), *European Cinema: Inside Out, Images of the Self and the Other in Postcolonial European Film* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag, 2003), pp. 119-32.

twentieth century African-American novelist James Baldwin: "If you know whence you came, there is really no limit to where you can go". "More than most Europeans", Houston and Knox contend, "the Scots can identify with Baldwin's sentiments".¹⁸² The inference can only be that this is because 'the [sic] Scots' and African-Americans have each endured comparable, generations-long histories of systematic exclusion on the grounds of ethnic discrimination, from wider, 'alien' national historiographic traditions and social structures. Both communities were originally subsumed by historical accident and/or misfortune, but certainly through no fault or conscious wish of their own. Michael Coyne illustrates, with specific reference to the history of Scotland's cinematic representation, the same general contemporary ideation of modern national history and identity when he asks, with blithe rhetorical certainty,

Is there any real difference between the eye-rolling antics of [the late Scottish character actor] John Laurie (1897-1980) and those of Stepin Fetchit (1902 - 1985) [the late African-American character actor ostracised by many African-Americans due to his racially offensive, stereotypical screen persona]?¹⁸³

Yet while a set of diffuse colonial and/or postcolonial metaphors appear to have held fairly consistent sway in Scottish film criticism since the early '80s, the institutions and texts most often identified as the key perpetrators of Scottish cinema and national cultures' perceived subjugation have changed radically since that decade. During the '90s, continued deployment of colonial and post-colonial metaphors increasingly reached diametrically and self-consciously opposed conclusions about the ideological character and *raison d'être* of Scottish culture and identity from those of key antecedents like Nairn and Scotch Reels.

¹⁸² R. A. Houston & W. W. J. Knox, 'Introduction: Scots and their histories', in Houston & Knox (eds.), *The New Penguin History of Scotland: From the earliest times to the present day* (London: Penguin, 2001), p. xiii.

¹⁸³ Michael Coyne, 'Review: *Brigadoon, Braveheart and the Scots*', in *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, Vol. 1.2 (2004), pg. 314. My inserts.

Specifically, the prime instruments of Scottish culture's still-assented-to 'colonial oppression' increasingly came to be seen as precisely such earlier theorisations of that state as proposed by the Scotch Reels writers and associated figures like Nairn; Cairns Craig's earlier-noted recantation of his part in the original *Scotch Reels* volume is a representative instance of that wider process, for example. What was believed during the 1980s by its protagonists to be an oppositional contestation of national cultural colonisation was re-evaluated in the 1990s, and 'unmasked' as an insidious form of internally generated and policed colonial oppression in and of itself. In other words, the terms in which an earlier generation of critics diagnosed Scottish film and national cultures' central problems in turn *became* just those burdens in the minds of their immediate successors.

For example, Craig Beveridge and Ronald Turnbull specifically attacked McArthur's 'colonial' categorisation and theorisation of Scottish cinema and national culture. They were enthusiastic in their adoption of theorisations of identity politics in colonised states developed by black diasporic intellectuals, most immediately, Franz Fanon's theory of Inferiorisation, which the latter developed with specific reference to his involvement in the struggle to liberate Algeria and other North African colonial territories from French control after WWII.¹⁸⁴ Beveridge and Turnbull define and apply Inferiorisation to the Scottish context as,

A relationship of national dependence which lead the native to doubt the worth and significance of inherited ways of life and embrace the styles and values of the coloniser.¹⁸⁵

In this light, Beveridge and Turnbull saw arguments such as those proposed by the Scotch Reels movement as active intellectual instruments through which Scottish cultural colonisation is perpetuated though self-denigration, rather than constituting (as the former movement argued) a necessary diagnostic act through which such colonisation was made

¹⁸⁴ See Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1965).

¹⁸⁵ Craig Beveridge & Ronald Turnbull, *The Eclipse of Scottish Culture: Inferiorism and the Intellectuals* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1989), pp. 1-5.

visible to a local audience, as a prelude to its subsequent consensual contestation and dismantling. For instance, castigation of Tartanry's treatment of Jacobite history and iconography allegedly "accords perfectly with the governing image of Scotland as a dark and backward culture".¹⁸⁶ By contrast, Beveridge and Turnbull proposed that it is possible to actively reclaim the very same native traditions as culturally legitimate, politically progressive artefacts, sustaining as they do,

A powerful expression of Scottish identity, a symbol of ideals and aspirations which though once defeated, cannot be forgotten or erased, and which constitute the paradigm for an ever-possible Rising.¹⁸⁷

Such radical reassessments by the Scottish intelligentsia of the original model of national film criticism abounded from the late '80s on. This marked a self-willed transformation of the discipline's assumptions about the historic status and contemporary health of Scottish culture.

Pam Cook, for example, dismissed the 'discursive colonisation' thesis with reference to *Rob Roy*'s premeditated flirtation with Tartanry, arguing in direct contrast to the Scotch Reels position that, "nostalgia might play a productive role in national identity, releasing the desire for social change or resistance"¹⁸⁸ rather than actively preventing this.

Elsewhere, the early historical overview chapters of Petrie's *Screening Scotland* provided a representatively anti-*Scotch Reels*, implicitly post- or anti-colonial, re-reading of the ideological significances of British and American-produced 'tartan' epics. Rather than constituting important instruments in Scotland's ongoing cultural colonisation by other, more powerful, national formations and film cultures, Petrie concludes that the discourse of "Jacobite romance... retains a political resonance in some quarters, preserving a kernel

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, pg. 14.

¹⁸⁷ Craig Beveridge & Ronnie Turnbull, *Scotland after Enlightenment: Image and Tradition in Modern Scottish Culture* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1997), pg. 79.

¹⁸⁸ Pam Cook, *Fashioning the Nation: Costume and Identity in British Cinema* (London: BFI, 1996), pg. 26. My insert.

of radical opposition to Unionist incorporation”.¹⁸⁹ Similarly, for Jane Sillars, the dominant traditions of representing Scotland in cinema (which she terms ‘naturalism’ and ‘whimsy’) are not unilaterally repressive in the way that the Scotch Reels position argued. In Whimsy’s ahistorical Arcadias, for example, cinematic ‘Scotland’ is a land populated by natives who sidestep repressive prescriptions of gender, class and other forms of social and national identities, both in their relationships with each other and in the transformative effects they wield over visitors from other cultures, proposing not “that people are shaped by their environment”, but instead “presenting means by which they negotiate their placing”.¹⁹⁰ Moreover, rapidly consolidating ’90s local film and television production sectors could usefully employ established cinematic tropes of ‘Scottishness’ for more pragmatic reasons, given that, “the use of heavily stereotypical depictions of Scotland works to market an exportable product”.¹⁹¹ Some ’90s commentators went yet further, arguing that the Scotch Reels school was incorrect, not in its understanding of the negative ideological significance of Scotland’s traditional cinematic representations, but in ascribing *any* such form of importance to them at all. The historian Frank McLynn followed Scotch Reels in acknowledging the historical centrality of a utopian and primitivist tradition of representing Scotland in international cinema, yet then diverged completely in his final assessment of that tradition’s ideological (non-) significance: “I do not see what is so insulting about having Scotland regarded as a repository of true values or a Shangri-La”.¹⁹² Likewise, Jeffrey Richards accepted the factual accuracy of *Scotch Reels*’ major historical proposition, namely, that Scotland’s cinematic representation has largely proceeded “in the terms crystallised by Hollywood”.¹⁹³ Yet he too dismissed out of hand, the subsequent contention that this had profound ideological knock-on effects for Scottish culture and society. It appears that, for Richards, Hollywood’s economic and cultural hegemony in Scotland simply did and does

¹⁸⁹ Petrie, *Screening Scotland*, op. cit., pg. 70.

¹⁹⁰ Jane Sillars, ‘Drama, Devolution and Dominant Representations’, in Jane Stokes & Anna Reading (eds.), *The Media in Britain: current debates and developments* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1999), pg. 250.

¹⁹¹ Ibid, pg. 251.

¹⁹² Frank McLynn, ‘Clansmen are always kilted, pipes forever skirling, eagles continually wheel and soar’, in *The Herald*, (30/1/99), pg. 17.

¹⁹³ Jeffrey Richards, ‘Scotland’, in Richards, *Film and British National Identity: from Dickens to Dad’s Army* (Manchester: MUP, 1997), pg. 175.

not possess a political corollary of any kind, let alone a repressive one: “people evidently preferred myth to reality. No-one frogmarched them to the cinema”.¹⁹⁴

Most importantly, just as the most influential and representative 1980s reading of Scottish film culture publicly aligned itself with a parallel, wider reading of national history and culture as a whole, the pessimistic ‘colonisation’ analysis proposed by Tom Nairn, so the seminal late ’90s/early ’00s work of Duncan Petrie pursued the same strategy, but to a diametrically opposed conclusion. Instead of Nairn, Petrie acknowledges the influence of Cairns Craig’s positive 1990s reassessment of modern Scottish cultural history.¹⁹⁵ While Nairn proposed modern Scotland’s disastrous, quasi-colonial subjugation to a wider British state and national identity, Craig advances a celebratory reading of modern Scottish cultural production, believing that indigenous creativity constituted and constitutes an anti-colonial form of national resistance, through which “Scotland went on imagining itself as a nation and went on constituting itself as a national imagination in defiance of its attempted or apparent incorporation into a unitary British culture”.¹⁹⁶ This wider contemporary critical orthodoxy - the negative image of that which held at the moment of *Scotch Reels* - in turn structures Petrie’s view of Scottish cinema immediately after the end of the ’90s, not simply as a healthy, recently emergent sector of Scottish cultural production, but as a symptomatic efflorescence of an equally vital, confidently post-British national sphere and identity:

A new parliament sits in Edinburgh consolidating Scotland’s growing sense of cultural self-determination. The new Scottish cinema has an opportunity... to play an important role at the heart of a revitalised national culture in reflecting the diversity of contemporary Scottish experience.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, pg. 210.

¹⁹⁵ See Petrie, *Contemporary Scottish Fictions*, op. cit., pg. 11.

¹⁹⁶ Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel*, op. cit., pg. 36.

¹⁹⁷ Petrie, *Screening Scotland*, op. cit., pg. 226.

What remains to be considered, however, is the extent to which this contemporarily hegemonic, revisionist view represents a considered, if near-total, re-evaluation of Scottish film criticism's originary strictures, or whether it - at least in part - misguidedly replaces an earlier, monolithically dystopian view of modern Scottish (film) culture with an equally unwieldy utopian alternative.

To some extent, my own work on '90s Scottish cinema is inevitably shaped by this wider contemporary intellectual turn. In my central emphasis upon a facilitating local appropriation of working practices developed within national cinemas that had previously dominated Scotland's cinematic representation in near-absolute terms, the influence of the 'post-colonial' paradigm is clearly at work, for example. I would argue that the precise terms in which an indigenous Scottish cinema emerged during the '90s indicated the extent to which the 'colonisation' model overstated traditionally dominant American and British national cinemas' and cultures' ability to subordinate their Scottish counterparts with near-complete efficiency and authority. The paradox implicit in the Scotch Reels/Nairn thesis is that it sought to provoke the radical transformation of both Scottish film and national cultures, whilst apparently arguing that the defining historical characteristic of both related to their immutability, their successful resistance of such reinvention. There is a defeatist and self-defeating aspect to the analysis of any cultural formation which manages to simultaneously stress both the absolute necessity and impossibility of the latter's radical reconstruction.

Yet despite the unlooked-for advances made within Scottish film culture during the 1990s, I would be chary of presenting this as indicative of a 'post-colonial' national cultural Rubicon. Certainly, as my subsequent arguments will illustrate (and as my introduction has already noted) 'Scottish-American' institutional and creative strategies enjoyed their most significant industrial and national cultural successes during a comparatively brief but vital moment in the mid '90s; yet by the decade's end, they no longer seemed adequate agendas to maintain the infant critical mass of Scottish cinema that they had been instrumental in creating. The development of '90s Scottish cinema therefore illustrates the acuity of a definition of the 'post-colonial' moment in which,

It [is] very difficult to conceive of a post-colonialism which means that we are no longer in a colonial situation; 'post', rather, is actually about how that colonialism is being negotiated.¹⁹⁸

Analogously, in a discussion of postcolonial Caribbean identities and cinemas, Stuart Hall argues that these cultural phenomena are never "already [or imminently] accomplished historical fact[s]", but always constitute instead "a process, never complete and always constituted within and not 'without' the terms of representation".¹⁹⁹ He continues:

The error is not to perceive this [historic colonial] presence in terms of power, but to locate that power as wholly external to us – an extrinsic force, whose influence can be thrown off like the serpent sheds its skin.²⁰⁰

Yet unlike Hall's analysis of the post-colonial Caribbean, much recent Scottish criticism appears eager to suggest that a previously oppressed national cinema and/or culture has thrown, or can throw off, a historically desiccated 'skin' comprised of external industrial and cultural domination and internal intellectual misrepresentation.

Finally, we might ask a more fundamental question, regarding whether 'postcolonial' framings of contemporary Scottish national culture and identity are appropriate in *any* form whatsoever. After all, Scotland was a disproportionately important constituent part of a colonising British state which enjoyed global success for more than two centuries. As Tom Nairn notes, Scotland's active complicity in the British imperial adventure made it "a satellite of one of the metropole-states rather than [or perhaps alternatively, *as well*

¹⁹⁸ John Caughie *et al.*, 'Discussion', in Duncan Petrie (ed.), *Screening Europe: image and identity in contemporary European cinema* (London: BFI, 1992), pg. 55.

¹⁹⁹ Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation', in *Framework*, n. 36 (1989), pg. 68. My inserts.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid*, pg. 78. My Insert.

as] an oppressed nationality”.²⁰¹ Even if this historical fact had certain repressive cultural consequences comparable to those experienced within colonised nations, it becomes difficult, even morally problematic, to draw direct comparisons between a “suppressed state” within Britain and the “assimilated, subjected (and then renascent) nationalit[ies]”²⁰² exploited by an imperial formation with ‘suppressed’ Scotland active at its heart. ‘Postcolonial’ framings of contemporary Scotland might thus come to look less like a progressive reassessment of national cultural history, and more like the last, mendacious gasp of North British Imperialism. Here, it is the intellectual and cultural resources and artefacts of previously colonised ethnic diasporas that are rapaciously plundered and appropriated by individual mouthpieces of authority within First World societies, academic ‘Scotsmen on the Make’.

Perhaps the central difficulty lies in Scottish film criticism’s consistent tendency, in its various evolutionary stages, to project rhetorical arguments made about a traditionally marginal, only recently emergent, section of the national culture onto that culture conceived as a whole. The validity of ’90s references to Scottish culture, at least “on the filmmaking front”, as that of a “Third World country”²⁰³ is conceived here in a much more qualified, two-fold sense. Firstly, there is that term’s traditional association with material issues of uneven economic and industrial development. In the particular case of Scottish film culture, this refers to the remarkable infrastructural fragility still visible at the start of the twentieth century’s last decade. The ‘figurative’ and ‘participatory’ aspects of cinematic representation of Scotland during the ’90s were therefore largely determined by local filmmakers’ self-conscious attempts to negotiate and transform Scottish cinema’s material etiolation. This fact in turn points towards the second way in which colonial and postcolonial theories and reference points can be judiciously applied to the study of 1990s Scottish cinema. That cinema seems to exhibit the characteristics that Frederic Jameson magisterially (and controversially) ascribes to Third World cultural production, namely that,

²⁰¹ Tom Nairn, *After Britain: New Labour and the Return of Scotland* (London: Granta, 2000), pg. 231. My insert.

²⁰² Ibid, pg. 227.

²⁰³ McArthur, ‘In Praise...’, op. cit., pg. 30.

All third-world texts are necessarily... allegorical... even those which are seemingly private... necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: *the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society.*²⁰⁴

The '90s Scottish films I discuss below are 'allegorical' in Jameson's sense, in that the particular figurative forms taken by their representations of national history, society and identity cannot be understood and assessed in auteurist terms alone, the more or less progressive and innovative creative statements of 'private individuals'. Rather, given that such agents were necessarily also engaged in creating the participatory basis for a sustainable Scottish film industry, the specific representations of 'nation' that were felt most appropriate to that latter aim should simultaneously be read as products of the material pressures accruing to 'the embattled situation' inherent in working within a traditionally underdeveloped national cinema.

Overall, however, 'colonial' and/or 'postcolonial' remain problematic, over-determined epithets to apply wholesale to post-1990 Scottish film culture, despite the undeniable difficulties posed for that culture by its traditional domination by other, more powerful national cinemas. A closely related, but more nuanced and less rhetorically over-determined alternative approach to the study of Scottish film and national cultures has recently been suggested by certain writers, drawing on the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze's conception of 'minor' national identities and cultural traditions. Deleuze sees Kafka, a Czechoslovakian Jew whose literary output was written in German, as emblematic of a minor creative practice.²⁰⁵ Minor practices, cultures and identities are neither subsumed within, nor completely and consciously oppositional to, the more powerful, major, national traditions and formations that have historically overshadowed

²⁰⁴ Frederic Jameson, 'Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism', in *Social Text*, n. 15 (Fall 1986), pg. 69.

²⁰⁵ See Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature* (trans. Dana Pollan) (Minnesota: University of Minnesota, 1986).

the former's development. David Martin-Jones, in a discussion of Peter Mullan's *Orphans* as a minor transformation of British cinematic traditions of realism, suggests that,

The easiest way to conceive of a minor practice is in the form of a creole, a minor use - often by an immigrant or a diasporic population - of a dominant language. To use a major voice in a minor way is to make it stutter or stammer.²⁰⁶

Adopting a more general frame of national cultural reference, Michael Gardiner proposes that,

We think of Scotland... as a minor nation. For Deleuze... minor does not mean small or insignificant; it describes the function of iteration (speaking) within a larger, *major* language or power... and it implies an entity which is always becoming something else. Scotland, in Deleuzian terms, always has to *become* in the face of a more powerful *being*...²⁰⁷

My own precise understanding of 1990s Scottish cinema's evolution, both in terms of its identification of a local 'creole' of American cinematic traditions ('becoming in the face of a more powerful being') and its belief that such strategies enjoyed finite degrees and periods of success during the decade, seems far closer to this emerging theoretical frame of reference than to the established 1980s dystopian/colonial or 1990s utopian/postcolonial strands of thought discussed above. The 'Scottish-American' cinema of the 1990s did not constitute a once-and-for-all triumphant 'liberation' of Scotland's hitherto crippling marginalised film culture. Yet the fundamentally productive legacy of the decade is manifest in the extent to which, from the perspective of the early twenty first century, it seems possible to speak with more confidence than ever before of an

²⁰⁶ Martin-Jones, David, 'Orphans, a work of minor cinema from post-devolutionary Scotland', in *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, Vol. 1. 2 (2004), pg. 229.

²⁰⁷ Michael Gardiner, *Modern Scottish Culture* (Edinburgh: EUP, 2005), pp. 1-2.

industrially secure, culturally distinctive Scottish cinema. The terms of that cinema's emergence over the past fifteen years or so, and the challenges these have posed for critical commentary, both illustrate the validity of Robert Crawford's observation that,

Often what small or vulnerable cultural groups need is not simply a deconstruction of rhetorics of authority, but a construction or reconstruction of a 'usable past', an awareness of a cultural tradition which will allow them to preserve or develop a sense of their own distinctive identity, their constituting difference.²⁰⁸

The preceding discussion of structuring ironies and central themes within Scottish cinema studies aimed to identify and narrate one such 'usable critical past'; the following chapters attempt to do the same for the contemporary cinema which forms a major reason for that intellectual tradition's existence in the first place.

²⁰⁸ Robert Crawford, *Devolving English Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pg. 5.

Chapter 2

Metamorphosis: Scottish cinema, 1990 - 1995

Introduction: Kafka to Capra

March 27th 1995: a Scottish filmmaker enjoys what was at the time an unaccustomed moment in the sun. That evening in Los Angeles, writer/director Peter Capaldi won the Best Short Film Oscar for his twenty-five minute drama *Franz Kafka's It's a Wonderful Life* (GB, 1993). Capaldi's film cross-pollinates the eponymous Czech writer's travails as he tries to begin writing his 1915 novella *Metamorphosis* with the cathartic crisis endured by George Bailey, hero of the canonical Classical Hollywood film *It's A Wonderful Life* (Frank Capra, USA, 1946). The cohabitants of Kafka's Prague garret rally round the troubled, isolated writer on Christmas Eve. Their support enables him to start writing his masterpiece.

In retrospect, Capaldi's individual success is symptomatic of a more general industrial and critical turning point for Scottish cinema from the early '90s on. However, when trying to acknowledge the fact of this upturn and then understand the reasons why it occurred, it is not *Franz Kafka's...* Oscar success that is most significant. Rather, it is the extraordinarily particular juxtaposition of extra-textual references wittily advertised in the film's title. This juxtaposition allegorises the precise terms in which Scottish cinema deliberately performed radical institutional and creative 'metamorphoses' during the first half of the 1990s. While European Modernism structures *Franz Kafka's...* narrative premise, Hollywood populism ultimately endows the film's climax with its considerable comedic and ironic impact. So too in early '90s Scottish film culture as a whole, Modernist, Continental European artistic traditions (personified in Capaldi's short by the figure of Kafka) initially co-existed with, but ultimately gave way to, affirmatory, popular American counterparts (symbolised by *It's a Wonderful Life*).

To clarify: during the first half of the '90s, an established creative, institutional and critical prescription of 'Scottish cinema' along European Art lines rapidly gave way to a

successor defined with deferential reference to a variety of Hollywood Studio and American Independent exemplars. A formally innovative, public subsidy-dependent, politically radical, non-commercial ideal model of Scottish feature cinema was replaced by a more formally pragmatic, commercially aspirant, politically diffuse successor. The latter was consciously aimed at mainstream domestic and international cinema audiences with increasing confidence. Representatively in *Franz Kafka's...*, the as-yet unwritten *Metamorphosis*, a canonical literary text in the very earliest stages of its composition, acts as a synecdoche for cultural production in general (and contemporary Scottish film production in particular) as an isolated and precarious process. As Kafka's downstairs neighbour notes, "Mr K" is "frail—like many of the artistic disposition". By contrast, the later reference to *It's A Wonderful Life* conceives of cultural production generally (and a newly emergent Scottish cinema specifically) as a series of individually transcendent moments only made possible by the existence of enabling infrastructures of community.

Analogously, for many contemporary participants a Scottish cinema not reducible to the *oeuvre* of Bill Forsyth had 'begun' in the late 1980s through pioneering local engagements with European Art cinema. However, its manifest destiny, or 'end', was as an internationally competitive film culture typically threading local variants through the web of various American generic and aesthetic forms. John Brown, a former officer of the Scottish Film Council, apprehended this process in prescient terms as early as 1993, the year Capaldi's short was produced. He argued that what little constituted late '80s/early '90s Scottish cinema supported by the Scottish Film Production Fund, at that time the major domestic patron for local feature work, were all,

Projects conceived for the subsidised production sector and aimed at the minority audience which goes to art houses and RFTs [Regional Film Theatres]... reflecting... a liberal middle age/class perspective.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁹ John Brown, 'Letter: Poor Scots', in *Sight & Sound*, Vol. 3. 10 (Oct 1993), pg. 64. The films Brown has in mind here include: *Venus Peter*, *Play Me Something*, *Silent Scream*, *Prague* (Ian Sellar, Fr/GB, 1992) and *Blue Black Permanent* (Margaret Tait, GB, 1993).

By contrast, Brown predicted,

The new generation of Scottish filmmakers shows little sign of being interested in arthouse fare. Their sights are set on making the Scottish equivalents of *El Mariachi* [Robert Rodriguez, Mex/USA, 1992], *Just Another Girl on the I.R.T.* [Leslie Harris, USA, 1992] and *Reservoir Dogs* [Quentin Tarantino, USA, 1992]... and getting them into the multiplexes.²¹⁰

Brown's analysis offered a remarkably acute prediction of the manner in which Scottish film culture would develop in the first half of the 1990s and beyond.

This chapter's arguments aim, then, to document and explain an undeniable and rapid upturn in Scottish cinema's industrial and critical fortunes between 1990 and 1995 in a similar manner to that proposed by Brown. Yet it also adopts a critical stance regarding the uncomplicated contemporary rhetoric—whether celebratory or condemnatory, institutional or academic—which sought to comment upon this phenomenon even as it unfolded. Through extended discussion of four films in particular—*The Big Man* (David Leland, GB, 1990), *Soft Top*, *Hard Shoulder*, *Rob Roy* and *Shallow Grave*—I argue that two generic templates were established during the early '90s. These came to structure much post-'95 production, as I go on to discuss in chapter 5. The templates in question, as my introduction indicated, can be labelled the 'Scottish Independent' film (*Soft Top*, *Shallow Grave*) and the 'Scottish Classical' movie (*The Big Man*, *Rob Roy*). I argue that the former combined qualities of industrial pragmatism and entrepreneurialism in ways allowing for potentially progressive and industrially sustainable approaches to the representation of Scottish identity in domestic feature cinema. By contrast, the latter model, aspiring to work at much more ambitious levels of production funding and international distribution, instantiated a far more speculative industrial model for Scottish film production, and tended towards the reiteration of well-established, often phallo- and ethnocentric images of 'Scottishness'. Finally, the juxtaposition of 'known' (*Shallow*

²¹⁰ Ibid.

Grave, Rob Roy) and comparatively 'unknown' (*Soft Top, Hard Shoulder, The Big Man*) '90s films is intended as a way of demonstrating that contemporary Scottish cinema did not near-instantaneously 'appear' with a brace of fortuitous successes in 1995-96. Rather, the 'known' cinema constituted by *Shallow Grave* and *Rob Roy*, not to mention the continuously expanding body of work which followed in those films' wake, needs to be understood as a culmination of institutional and creative developments taking place in the early '90s. Such developments were as materially significant for, as they remain critically overlooked in, discussion of the far better-known Scottish cinema of the latter half of the decade.

Art or Nothing: early '90s definitions of Scottish cinema

During the early '90s, even sympathetic observers of, and participants within, Scottish cinema bemoaned its seemingly entrenched creative underachievement. Representatively, in 1992 Gillies Mackinnon bemoaned that "after Bill Forsyth" Scotland had produced "nothing of any great significance".²¹¹ Not only were such contemporary perceptions of collective artistic 'failure' rife, they were closely linked to an equally pervasive and uncomfortable awareness of the Scottish production sector's continuing industrial and institutional underdevelopment. While the country's largest public financier, the Scottish Film Production Fund, had seen its annually available production monies rise from £80 000 at its inception in 1982 to £214 000 by 1990, the organisation's outgoing Chairman conceded that the latter figure still remained "puny when set against the actual costs of film production".²¹² Indeed, during the early '90s, what little local infrastructure did exist seemed actually to be contracting in places. Scotland's only film processing laboratory, Rank, and the country's only permanent studio space, Blackcat, both closed in early 1991.²¹³ The early '90s consensus regarding Channel 4, peremptorily acclaimed in the

²¹¹ Quoted in Bob Flynn, 'Shooting stars in the old country', in *The Guardian*, (31/7/92), pg. 32.

²¹² Ian Lockerbie, 'Pictures in a Small Country: The Scottish Film Production Fund', in Eddie Dick (ed.), *From Limelight to Satellite: A Scottish Film Book* (London/Glasgow: BFI/SFC, 1990), pg. 174.

²¹³ For Rank see Alan Hunter, 'Highland Hopes', in *Screen International*, n. 819 (9/8/91), pg. 10; for Blackcat, see Anon, 'Fresh blow for film industry as production company folds', in *The Scotsman*, (13/4/91), pg. 5.

early '80s as “a radically new source of money and an outlet for Scottish filmmaking”²¹⁴, was that the broadcaster had singularly failed to deliver in these terms. By the late '80s/early '90s, commissions dispensed annually to local film and television producers only amounted to around 10% of the annual levy that Channel 4 extracted from Scottish broadcasters' advertising revenues.²¹⁵ Tellingly, in 1989, the broadcaster's outgoing Chief Executive, Jeremy Isaacs, admitted regret that Channel 4 had not “done enough for Scotland”²¹⁶ in terms of commissioning support. Such specific disappointments formed part of a more general perceived failure by Scottish filmmakers and producers “to tap UK-wide cash sources like the British Film Institute in the face of stiff competition from their better-funded English counterparts”.²¹⁷ Against this depressing backdrop, it seemed difficult for those involved in early '90s Scottish audiovisual sectors not to conclude that, “we have struggled to establish a distinctive moving screen culture simply because there just aren't enough opportunities to do this kind of work on home soil”.²¹⁸

In response to the straitened material circumstances of the late '80s and early '90s, a contemporary critical consensus rose around the belief that, “Scottish film-making is a subset of British, which in turn is a subset of European, filmmaking”.²¹⁹ Accordingly, the central *raison d'être* of a publicly subsidised Scottish “non-commercial European art cinema” was the collective textual project of “exploring Scotland's relationship with Europe... allow[ing] a space for the articulation of an identity [for the nation], itself necessarily hybrid, diverse and outward looking”.²²⁰ Thus, both *Play Me Something* and *Prague* explored cross-cultural links between Scotland and the Continent. The former did so through the comparative juxtaposition of Hebridean Island and Italian rural cultures, the latter through its central character's attempts to trace his Central European Jewish

²¹⁴ John Brown, ‘Scotland Be Damned’, in *Sight & Sound*, Vol. 59. 4 (Autumn 1990), pg. 285.

²¹⁵ See Charlie Gormley, ‘The Impact of Channel 4’, in Dick (ed.), op. cit., pp. 185-192; Gareth Wardell, ‘Opinion’, in *Producer*, n. 9 (Autumn 1989), pg. 27; Catherine Lockerbie, ‘Tenacious Maverick: Interview with Mike Alexander’, in *The Scotsman*, (4/1/89), pg. 9.

²¹⁶ Quoted in Anon, ‘Sporran Partners’, in *Screen International*, n. 717 (12/8/89), pg. 19.

²¹⁷ Peter Jinks, ‘Getting into the picture’, in *The Scotsman*, (16/1/92), pg. 15.

²¹⁸ Alan Morrison, ‘Working in reel time’, in *Theatre Scotland*, Vol. 2 n. 7 (Autumn 1993), pg. 27.

²¹⁹ Steve McIntyre, ‘Vanishing Point: Feature Film Production in a Small Country’, in John Hill, Martin McLoone & Paul Hainsworth (eds.), *Border Crossing: Film in Ireland, Britain and Europe* (London/Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies/University of Ulster/BFI, 1994), pg. 90.

²²⁰ Duncan Petrie, ‘Peripheral visions: film-making in Scotland’, in Wendy Everett (ed.), *European Identity in Cinema* (Exeter: Intellect, 1996), pg. 101. My insert.

roots in the Czech capital. Both *Play Me Something* and *Silent Scream* were greeted as films designed exclusively for circulation on the subsidised European exhibition and festival circuits, the former winning the best film award at the 1989 Barcelona Film Festival, and the latter the prestigious Silver Bear at Berlin in 1990.

Such representative thematic preoccupations and circulation patterns of late '80s/early '90s Scottish cinema should, it was generally argued at the time, "be taken as a riposte to... an American model of industrialised production distant from the vital roots of culture".²²¹ With regards to the wider contemporary British context, John Hill proposed a parallel, influential distinction between local achievement of "a national film industry", as opposed to "a national cinema proper".²²² For Hill, the latter expressly "works with or addresses nationally specific materials".²²³ Such a 'proper' British cinema required European-style state subsidy to nurture and protect it from the ravages of the commercial marketplace. Its "economically modest" nature in fact potentially encouraged a "culturally ambitious"²²⁴ project of progressive intervention within British social and political issues of the day. This, others argued, was because 'properly' national filmmakers by definition disavowed (or were materially precluded from flirtation with) the culturally undesirable (and in any case, logistically unachievable) "forced, as well as... elective, internationalism"²²⁵ of Hollywood-derived institutional and creative models characterised by their monomaniacal fixation with commercial profit.

Yet with regards to early '90s Scotland, this contemporary critical orthodoxy seems in retrospect too determined to represent film industrial misfortune as film cultural bounty. Given the paucity of domestic funding available for Scottish feature work, filmmakers were as much compelled as inclined to seek the majority of their production monies from metropolitan patrons such as the BFI Production Board—*Venus Peter*, *Play Me Something*, *Silent Scream*, *Blue Black Permanent*—and to tailor the thematic and formal

²²¹ Philip Schlesinger, 'Scotland, Europe and Identity', in Dick (ed.), op. cit., pg. 232.

²²² John Hill, 'The issue of national cinema and British film production', in Duncan Petrie (ed.), *New Questions of British Cinema* (London: BFI, 1991), pp. 10.

²²³ Ibid, pg. 17.

²²⁴ Ibid, pg. 19.

²²⁵ Paul Willemsen, 'The National', in Willemsen, *Looks and Frictions: essays in cultural studies and film theory* (London: BFI, 1994), pg. 211.

aspects of proposed projects accordingly. During the late 1980s and early '90s, the Board articulated a politicised, sociological—not commercial—funding remit, subsidising filmmakers from social, regional and/or ethnic groups perceivedly disadvantaged by their historical exclusion from the practical means of self-representation in British film and television cultures: so industrially and infrastructurally underdeveloped was contemporary Scotland that it amply met such criteria.²²⁶

This state of affairs did not necessarily imply a consciously chosen Scottish distinction between desirably non-commercial, Continentally-derived forms of production and more commercially orthodox, American-inspired models. Rather, it entailed a compulsory recourse to the only contemporarily available mode of funding which made it possible to talk in any meaningful sense, however curtailed, of an ongoing Scottish cinema. In 1993, David Bruce, Director of the SFC, considering the stubborn problem of Scottish film culture's ongoing industrial marginalisation, argued that "there can be no complete, coherent film culture without production".²²⁷ However, with regards to this requirement, the distinguishing characteristic of early '90s Scottish cinema was not its principled, signature rejection of mainstream commercial imperatives and practices in favour of European Art alternatives. Rather, it was a far more disquieting "dependence on both the cultural and industrial imperatives of the metropolitan centres in Britain"²²⁸, embodied in the small alms the latter typically distributed for small-scale experimental filmmaking during the period in question.

Breaking through the surface of such stony ground, an individual achievement such as *Franz Kafka's...* constituted not an isolated success story, but one link in a much longer chain of unprecedented local advances made between 1994 and 1997. Days after winning his Oscar, Capaldi signed a deal with Miramax to develop a self-scripted feature project

²²⁶ For details on industry anxieties around the Production Board's "didactic" funding agenda during the late 1980s/early '90s, see Deborah Orr, 'Cannes: In a time warp or out ahead?', in *The Guardian*, (18/5/92), pg. 32.

²²⁷ David Bruce, 'Collaboration – not Isolation', in *Scottish Film & Visual Arts*, n. 6 (4th Quarter 1993), pg. 18;

²²⁸ Robin MacPherson, *Independent film and television in Scotland: a case of independent cultural reproduction?* (Unpublished M. A. Thesis, University of Stirling, 1991), pg. 360.

which he also hoped to direct.²²⁹ Around the same time, Scottish independent producer Peter Broughan had managed to secure £16m of funding from United Artists to produce *Rob Roy*, then as now, the most ambitious collaboration ever between local creative talent and American production capital.²³⁰ BBC Scotland's drama department and London-based Independent production house Ecosse Films brokered a North American theatrical distribution deal with Miramax for *Mrs Brown*. In doing so, they turned a modestly budgeted period piece originally intended for terrestrial television broadcast into an Oscar-nominated international theatrical success.²³¹ Elsewhere, Scottish Screen Location proved remarkably efficacious in attracting increasing production work to Scotland from the organisation's establishment in 1990. By early 1996, SSL's Celia Stevenson noted that around £50 million of production spend had been attracted to Scotland, nearly £23 million of this in the boom year of 1994/5 alone.²³²

Elsewhere, low-budget indigenous Scottish productions made notable interventions at both domestic and international box offices during the same period. *Shallow Grave* was the most domestically profitable British film of that year²³³, while its production team's follow-up, *Trainspotting*, became the world's most profitable film for that year, when calculating profitability by setting production costs against global box office receipts. By the mid '90s, the representative tenor of local rhetoric concerning Scottish cinema's future prospects had become bullish, where only recently it had been baleful. For example, Allan Shiach, Chair of the soon-to-be-established Scottish Screen confidently proclaimed to delegates at the 1996 Edinburgh International Film Festival that, "film is potentially a massive business for us which has too long been seen as an artsy little enclave".²³⁴

²²⁹ See Duncan Petrie (ed.), *Inside Stories: Diaries of British Filmmakers at Work* (London: BFI, 1996), pp. 76-78.

²³⁰ See Angus Finney, 'Rob Roy: Case Study No. 3', in Finney, *The State of European Cinema: A new dose of reality* (London: Cassell, 1996) pp. 192-202.

²³¹ See James Rampton, 'Rae of good fortune', in *The Scotsman*, (12/6/00), pg. 21.

²³² See Celia Stevenson, 'Letter: Providing Locations', in *Sight & Sound*, Vol. 6. 2 (Feb 1996), pg. 64.

²³³ See Eddie Dyja (ed.), *The BFI Film and Television Handbook 1997* (London: BFI, 1996), pg. 37.

²³⁴ Allan Shiach, 'A Central Role For Scottish Screen', in *Scottish Film*, n. 16 (1996), pg. 22.

As already indicated, the earliest stirrings of Scottish cinema's 'transatlantic' self-transformation by the mid '90s are to be found in two neglected films from earlier in the decade, *Soft Top*, *Hard Shoulder* and *The Big Man*. Contrary to established Scottish film industrial and critical orthodoxies as the 1990s opened, both these films are notable for their creators' respective, self-conscious adoption of American generic and narrative reference points and creative working practices.

'Answering' America: The Big Man and the Western

The Big Man, an adaptation of William McIlvanney's 1985 novel of the same name, narrates the devastation of Thornbank, a fictional Scottish mining community, in the aftermath of the 1984/5 Miners' Strike. The novel and film's central protagonist, Danny Scoular, is an ex-miner left unemployed after serving a prison sentence for his part in picket line violence during the dispute. Consequently, he and his family are economically dependent on Danny's wife, a teacher. Danny is unable to accept this reversal of traditional gender roles. He therefore accepts a commission from Mason, a local businessman, to train for and take part in an illegal bare-knuckle boxing match. This decision places strain on his marriage. His wife leaves him and begins seeing a former boyfriend, Gordon, a young middle-class doctor. Danny's torment is increased when he discovers that Mason is in fact a drug dealer. The contest the latter organises has nothing to do with the restoration of individual and communal pride, as Danny mistakenly believes. He rebels against Mason and is ultimately saved from the villain and his henchmen by a physical show of strength by his estranged wife and fellow villagers.

The Big Man's screenwriter, Don McPherson, applied Western iconography and thematic structures to a Scottish story set during the 1984/5 Miners' Strike, because of the "things that make" the genre as he understood it, namely, a thematically apposite "concern about community, about historical change".²³⁵ Director David Leland strove for "that epic

²³⁵ Quoted in Michael O'Pray, 'The Big Man', in *Monthly Film Bulletin*, Vol. 57 n. 681 (Oct 1990), pg. 304.

quality”²³⁶ he associated with the Western. *The Big Man*’s £3.1m budget (notably large for the late ‘80s British industry) was co-financed by US studio Miramax as part of a long-term production deal with London-based independent producers Palace Pictures. However, the film’s invocation of American cinema, here with “an ending that might have come straight out of a John Ford western”²³⁷, resulted in a perceived generic uncertainty held responsible for a UK box office performance (£0.268m) which failed even to cover the costs of domestic film prints and advertising (£0.35m).²³⁸ Indeed, lacking the financial reserves to sustain speculative losses on a slate of American co-productions including *The Big Man*, Palace went into receivership in May 1992.²³⁹ Moreover, academic critics have not been inclined to recuperate *The Big Man* in political terms, typically seeing novel and film’s common attempt to link “Hollywood film to West of Scotland shabby post-industrial hinterland” as “a too-slick and forced cultural paralleling [that] no longer discusses Scottish issues for themselves”.²⁴⁰ There is, as we shall see, a considerable degree of mileage in such accusations.

Yet *The Big Man* remains of significance because it begins the cycle of 1990s ‘Scottish Classical’ movies identified in my introduction; the film also instantiates many of the recurrent representational and industrial problems besetting this cycle throughout that decade. Most importantly with regards to the former set of concerns, there is the film’s regressive conflation of national identity with a gendered equivalent, an ossified vision of heroic working class-masculinity that excludes, and on occasion is even violently hostile towards, feminine and other kinds of alternatives. The Western is, of course, a Classical Hollywood genre traditionally associated in film criticism with the privileging of masculine identities and concerns, “function[ing] precisely to privilege, examine and

²³⁶ Quoted in Bob Flynn, ‘Picking a Fight with the Big Man’, in *The Guardian*, (13/8/90), pg. 32.

²³⁷ Brian Pendreigh, ‘Great Expectations fail to be fulfilled’, in *The Scotsman*, (11/8/90), pg. 9.

²³⁸ Angus Finney, *The Egos Have Landed: The Rise and Fall of Palace Pictures* (London: Heinemann, 1996), pg. 202.

²³⁹ John Hill, *British Cinema in the 1980s: issues and themes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), pg. 45.

²⁴⁰ Douglas Gifford, ‘Imagining Scotlands: The Return to Mythology in Modern Scottish Fiction’, in Susanne Hagemann (ed.), *Studies in Scottish Fiction: 1945 to the Present* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996), pg. 43; See also Angus Calder, *Revolving Culture: Notes from the Scottish Republic* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1994), pg. 230.

celebrate the body of the male”.²⁴¹ While the creators of *The Big Man* publicly rationalised their adoption of Western generic structures and iconography to tell a Scottish story in radical political terms, showing and celebrating “[how a] community came together under the worst strain of the Thatcher years”²⁴², this project is problematised by the gender discourses imported alongside other, more easily visible elements of the Western film tradition.

Indeed, despite the filmmakers’ avowed intention to produce a ‘Scottish western’ articulating a leftist representation of 1980s local working class culture, the only character who overtly draws comparable Scottish-American cultural parallels within the diegesis proves fundamentally dishonest. Frankie, Danny’s childhood friend, is now an employee of the criminal boss Mason, acting as go-between during Danny’s training for the bareknuckle fight Mason organises. Frankie had previously left Thornbank to live in America. Upon his return, he claims that Glasgow “reminds me of New York”, and proclaims Danny as “Thornbank’s answer to Rocky Marciano”. Yet such assertions come to seem as untrustworthy as the rest of his actions and utterances. Frankie conceals Mason’s drug dealing activities from Danny and privately despises the inhabitants of his hometown whilst publicly wooing them. The idea he vocalises, that of a profitable dialogue between Scottish and American cultures and identities, echoes the structuring rationale behind the aesthetic, economic and political ambitions of *The Big Man*’s makers. Yet the latter are severely problematised through their intimate - indeed, exclusive - textual association with Frankie’s character.

Ultimately, *The Big Man*’s proposed ‘dialogue’ between Scottish and American cultures and cinemas - Danny ‘answering’ Rocky, Thornbank recalling New York, local social realism intertwining with Western iconography and *mythos* - proves an ossifying rather than dynamic intervention. It reinforces the reductive, regressive and stereotypical

²⁴¹ Stephen Neale, *Genre* (London: BFI, 1980), pg. 57; see also John Cawelti, *The Six Gun Mystique* (Bowling Green OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1971).

²⁴² Producer Steven Woolley quoted in Finney, *Egos...*, op. cit., pg. 198.

ideation of Scottish identity manifest in the well-known, “crudely phallogentric”²⁴³ spectre of the West Coast ‘hard man’. Symptomatically, Danny’s first words of the film, a speech at his wedding reception, co-opt his wife’s subjectivity and agency within his own, as he literally speaks for her: “My wife and I would like to...” While the text offers a schematic range of differing political and class variants of ‘Scottish’ identity - working class hero (Danny), entrepreneurially mobile class traitor (Mason), middle class arriviste (Gordon) - all are male, and are united by their shared conception of that identity and wider national culture as definable by metaphors of masculine individualism, public authority and male conflict. Even the doctor, Gordon, Danny’s class, sexual and professional ‘Other’, shares with him a conception of ideal nationality-masculinity located in revered occupational status, virility, honour and selfhood gained through agency in the workplace. The bare-knuckle boxing match Danny takes part in is ostensibly portrayed as a personal and social aberration, its illegality and immorality entailing that it must take place separate and hidden from ‘normal’ Scottish society. Yet the contest simply represents the apotheosis of an ideation of that society’s values and identity as essentially defined and policed by pugilistic male representatives. The ‘gloves come off’ only in the sense that this essential ‘fact’ about Scotland and Scottishness is stripped bare of the received social conventions that normally mask it.

This central ideation of Scottish identity solely in terms of antagonistic individual masculinities negates even the most overtly delineated elements of *The Big Man*’s intended progressive politique. In pointed contradistinction to the neo-Thatcherite ruthlessness of Mason and his henchmen, a communitarian Thornbank villager reassures Danny that “the community is behind you” during the latter’s training for the fight. Moreover, when Danny is belatedly forced to realise the limits of his own individual agency, it is Thornbank’s climactic show of physical strength through solidarity that ultimately saves him from Mason’s retribution. This apparently marks a positive comparison with the values embodied by Mason and Frankie, men who have literally and politically left Scottish community ‘behind’ in the pursuit of individual gain. However,

²⁴³ Robert Crawford, ‘De-defining Scotland’, in Susan Bassnett (ed.), *Studying British Cultures: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1997), pg. 93.

due to *The Big Man*'s predominant equation of isolated, gun-slinging masculinity with Scottish national identity, Thornbank and the working-class national culture it represents in shorthand also prove 'behind' Danny in a more problematic sense. The community's social workings and values are rarely discernible other than as embodied and defined through his words and actions. Narrative concentration on the isolated male hero, an integral element of the Western form, precludes audience understanding of both village and by extension, urban and/or industrial Scotland's supposed endurance and self-reconstruction in the face of economic and political adversity. In this sense, it is Frankie's scornful definition of the Thornbank community as "the living dead" that ironically carries most weight. The villagers possess mechanical agency at plot level, eventually acting as a *deus ex machina* to resolve Danny's conflict with Mason, but they are rendered incapable of voicing a variety of individual or collective subjectivities throughout the course of the film. Tellingly, their final protest against Mason is quite literally a silent one.

Accepting *The Big Man*'s anti-Thatcherite refutation of the axiom that 'there is no such thing as society' therefore requires a considerable leap of faith on the part of audiences. Director David Leland, justifying the film's hybridisation of local narrative content with international narrative structure and iconography, argued that the problem with identifiably British cinematic traditions of social realism was their aesthetic and political circumspection, "approach[ing] the working-class territory within a low key, small frame".²⁴⁴ Yet the film's representation of Scottishness through the refracting lens of the Western and its classically self-sufficient male heroes entails that, with regards to 'such a thing as' Scottish society, viewers never have the chance to verify its existence and values through extended observation. As Duncan Petrie notes, *The Big Man*'s deliberate 'transatlanticisation' (dictated as much by production company Palace Pictures' international commercial ambitions as it was by the filmmakers' political beliefs) "undermines its ability to engage with the specificities of the subject matter and to speak to and for a particular kind of social experience".²⁴⁵ Both Frankie and the filmmakers'

²⁴⁴ Quoted in Flynn, 'Picking...', op. cit. , pg. 32.

²⁴⁵ Duncan Petrie, *Screening Scotland* (London: BFI, 2000), pg. 153.

parallel linkings of American and Scottish cultures and identities prove driven by a desire for atomised financial advancement incompatible with their respective professions of communitarian politics and identity. *The Big Man*'s attempted "translation of a bleak, dissident social vision into distributable, hence profitable, cinema"²⁴⁶ through an industrially speculative, culturally regressive hybridisation of local and international cultural forms anticipates both the emergence proper of the 1990s 'Scottish Classical' cycle with *Rob Roy*, and many of the problems associated with it. *Soft Top, Hard Shoulder*, however, illustrates the contemporaneous emergence of a parallel 'Scottish Independent' film cycle which would assume a comparable centrality to its Classical counterpart as the '90s progressed, but with more productive industrial and representational consequences.

Routes to America: Soft Top, Hard Shoulder and the Road Movie

Written by and starring the maker of *Franz Kafka's It's A Wonderful Life*, Peter Capaldi, *Soft Top*'s central protagonist, Gavin Bellini, is a disaffected, third generation Scots-Italian children's book illustrator. He has spent years attempting to start a career in London, becoming estranged from his family in the process. An uncle informs Gavin that he has 36 hours to travel to Glasgow for his father's surprise 60th birthday party or he will be cut out of the substantial family fortune made from their ice-cream business. Unfortunately, Gavin is so poor that his car, the only available means of transport, is extremely unreliable. The film follows his continually thwarted, but ultimately successful, attempts to reach Glasgow by the given deadline. Capaldi utilised the Road Movie to structure the central protagonist's comic journey from London to Glasgow for a family reunion. This, he explained, was in part an attempt to achieve competitiveness at the domestic box office, "something that was commercially viable. A road movie seemed a good bet".²⁴⁷

²⁴⁶ Andrew Noble, 'Afterword: Reflections on Lynne Ramsay's *Ratcatcher*', in *Ireland and Scotland: Nation, Region, Identity: A record of the inter-disciplinary conference held in Trinity College Dublin 29-30 September 2000* (Dublin: Centre for Irish-Scottish Studies/TCD, 2001), pg. 96.

²⁴⁷ Quoted in Anon, 'On the road to success', in *Evening Standard*, (8/1/93), pg. 27.

Like *The Big Man*, *Soft Top*, *Hard Shoulder* has proved a critically unloved work. Academic response to the latter film dismissed it as “amusing but empty”²⁴⁸ thematically speaking, and formally unoriginal, labouring under “orthodox aesthetics”²⁴⁹ to boot. Contemporary press reception was equally underwhelmed. Unfavourable comparisons with Bill Forsyth were rife, aggravated by the film’s direct quotation of images from that director’s *oeuvre*.²⁵⁰ Yet the film instantiates a far more complicated, self-reflexive local engagement with the influence of American film industrial and cultural influences than does *The Big Man*. *Soft Top* is worthy of re-visitation not simply on the grounds of its figurative representation of Scottish identity (most of the film’s narrative, for example, takes place in England), but because it also outlined a potentially sustainable budgetary and generic model for ongoing Scottish feature production. This was one markedly different from the contemporarily dominant European Art model. I first discuss *Soft Top* as a figurative representation of Scottish identity and culture, and then assess its industrial significance as a model for subsequent local production.

As in *The Big Man*, the presence of American cultural reference points and influences is keenly felt in *Soft Top*. In the case of the latter film, this is so right from its outset. *Soft Top*’s opening sequence is a sepia tinted pastiche, leafing through the pages of an idyllic family photo album containing postcards of the Empire State Building and a kilted Highland soldier. Central protagonist Gavin’s voiceover relates these images to his family history. Gavin’s grandfather emigrated from Italy to New York, from where he wrote back to his family. But Gavin immediately reveals that his grandfather “was never in America. He was in Scotland... he was conned, [and] pretended he was in America so as not to appear stupid”. Like Frankie and the makers of *The Big Man*, Gavin’s grandfather and his creator, Capaldi, argue that from a Scottish geographical and cultural location one can still ‘be’ American and convince others of one’s location within American culture. This sleight of hand is achieved through local utilisation of elements

²⁴⁸ Colin McArthur, ‘The Cultural Necessity of a Poor Celtic Cinema’, in Hill, McLoone & Hainsworth (eds.), op. cit., pg. 116.

²⁴⁹ Colin McArthur, ‘On the trail of two Scottish Road Movies’, in *Scottish Film & Visual Arts*, n. 4 (2nd Quarter 1993), pg. 8.

²⁵⁰ See, for example, Philip Kemp, ‘Review: *Soft Top*, *Hard Shoulder*’, in *Sight & Sound*, Vol. 3. 1 (Jan 1993), pg. 52; Colin Brown, ‘*Soft Top*, *Hard Shoulder*’, in *Screen International*, n. 890 (15/1/93), pg. 8.

from the USA's national iconography and creative heritage (in Capaldi's particular case, his framing of *Soft Top* as a displaced Road Movie). Yet unlike *The Big Man*, *Soft Top* understands and presents this process of cinematic cross-cultural exchange as an extremely complex one, not least because, from a Scottish perspective, it does not take place on anything like equal terms.

Thus, in stark contrast to *The Big Man*'s dubious hyperbole, the overt linkages drawn between Scottish West Coast and American Eastern Seaboard in *Soft Top*'s opening sequence are deliberately bathetic: simply by stressing the filthy weather and fact that everyone speaks English, grandfather's postcards home to Italy can mislead by omission. Yet if *Soft Top* in this way pokes fun at national identities' characteristically vehement claims to "irredeem[able] particularity"²⁵¹, the film simultaneously questions opposing notions (as voiced in *The Big Man*) of Scottish and American culture and cinemas' easy interchangeability. Dialectical interchange between these cultures and cinemas, one historically dominant, the other traditionally marginal, simply cannot take place on studiously equitable terms. As some contemporary observers noted, *Soft Top* often sought to generate comic effect through deliberate suggestion that the very idea of a 'British Road Movie' was incongruous, given the size of the UK compared to the US. This perspective was manifest in the film's recurrent recreation of "thrilling moments from American movies on a reduced scale that makes them almost undetectable"²⁵², as when the malevolent long-distance truck of *Duel* (Steven Spielberg, USA, 1971) is self-deprecatingly recreated in a chase sequence involving a Volkswagen Polo.

Soft Top, precisely through its creators' consciously apologetic recourse to the exemplar of the Road Movie, proposes that Scottish national culture, cinema and identity's relations with their American counterparts are vulnerable ones. Uncritical aspiration towards the Other is potentially matched - indeed, precipitated by - an uncritical denigration of the Self. Thus, for Gavin's grandfather, Scotland is where one ends up after failing to make it to America. The imbalanced nature of this particular cross-cultural

²⁵¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised Edition (London: Verso, 1991), pg. 5.

²⁵² Adam Mars-Jones, 'The High Road', in *The Independent*, (15/1/93), pg. 16.

dialectic is so acute that a postcard sender projects himself 'there' (America), rather than wishing those he writes to 'here' (Scotland). A similar longing is voiced in a slightly later Scottish film, *Small Faces* (Gillies Mackinnon, GB, 1996), when the adolescent narrator notes that his mother's second marriage to an American uncle is "just my luck: the only American who ever emigrated to Scotland". In *Soft Top*, Gavin's grandfather's pretended equation of Scottish and American identities, thus implicitly valorising the latter at the expense of the former, is made in order to avoid personal ridicule. Yet this pretence, and the assertion of cultural equivalence it entails, literally renders him ridiculous in the eyes of the audience. He is simultaneously seen in home footage mimicking Charlie Chaplin, himself a powerful example of locally specific cultural traditions which are seamlessly incorporated into the apparently universal body of their American cinematic equivalent (an example of the move from the 'peripheral' to the international that Gavin's grandfather is prevented from making). Although Capaldi openly acknowledged an aspirational Scottish relationship towards American cinematic and popular cultural forms (the Road Movie) and values (film as profitable commodity), *Soft Top*'s opening sequence is a pointed reminder that to completely erase all signs of local specificity in attempting to do so is potentially both fraudulent and self-defeating.

Thus, grandfather's asserted internationalism, like that of *Soft Top* taken as a whole, whilst still predicated on a form of deception, both of self and others, seems less easily dismissible than *The Big Man*'s equivalent. It is too simplistic to reject the former film as "almost parasitic on the cinematic tradition it is not part of: Hollywood".²⁵³ While emphasising his film's willed distance from established British cinematic traditions ("I didn't really look to any British models")²⁵⁴, Capaldi rejected claims that *Soft Top* thus sought to mendaciously erase all signs of its indigenous identity and roots. The film's self-conscious hybridity rendered it "something unashamedly British – a road movie which wasn't pretending to be American".²⁵⁵ *Soft Top*'s imagined emigration is in fact a paradoxical phenomenon, clear-sighted about its own element of self-delusion; moreover,

²⁵³ Mars-Jones, op. cit.

²⁵⁴ Quoted in Anwar Brett, 'Car Trouble', in *What's On*, (13/1/93), pg. 22.

²⁵⁵ Quoted in Douglas Kennedy, 'The romance of the open road', in *The Sunday Telegraph*, (10/1/93), Review section, pg. xii.

this is precisely the matrix through which local 'art' is born here. This is literally so within the film's diegesis. The story of his grandfather's mistake is also that of Gavin's procreation (his progenitor marries locally), and Gavin becomes an artist: "I always knew I was different from them... I was an artist and they knew nothing about art". Similarly, the genesis and structure of *Soft Top* itself resulted from an individual Scottish creative engagement with American cinematic forms.

However, clear critical distinction between the American-influenced early '90s local cinematic 'art' of *The Big Man* and *Soft Top*, *Hard Shoulder* needs to be made on industrial, as well as representational, grounds. These two films' differing engagements with the former set of concerns are also representative of the later, better-known cinema that emerged from '90s Scotland. *The Big Man*, budgeted at over £3m and co-financed by local (Scottish Television), metropolitan (British Screen, Palace Pictures) and international (Miramax) sources was typical of what Steve McIntyre, Director of the Scottish Screen Industry Project during the early '90s, argued was the dominant, misguided mode of British feature production during the period, "medium budget films which attempt to cross over from a fairly specialised... market towards a more general [international] appeal".²⁵⁶ By contrast, *Soft Top*'s entire production budget (£0.2m) was equivalent to the cost of commissioning Ennio Morricone's score for *The Big Man* (another self-conscious local nod, of course, to the Western tradition).²⁵⁷ The former film thus appeared far closer to a low-budget, contemporary, Independent tradition of American filmmaking, "the chamber pieces of Hal Hartley... the work of Gus van Sant, films like *Slacker* [Richard Linklater, USA, 1991], *Poison* [Todd Haynes, USA, 1991], etc"²⁵⁸ rather than the medium- to high-budget, Classical counterpart which *The Big Man* took as its lodestar. The extremely low costs of *Soft Top* made it very likely to achieve

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ See Finney, *Egos...*, op. cit., pg. 201.

²⁵⁸ Steve McIntyre, 'Inventing the future – in praise of small films', in *Scottish Film & Visual Arts*, n. 5 (3rd Quarter 1993), pg. 17.

economic self-sufficiency in domestic markets, given typical early '90s levels of revenue gained by British product from UK cinema, video and television sales.²⁵⁹

McIntyre quite correctly concluded that the low-budget, American Independent model instantiated by a film like *Soft Top* was therefore a potentially progressive one in two regards for Scotland *per se*. In terms of national identity and culture's onscreen representation, *Soft Top*'s economic modesty allowed it to sidestep the far more expensive *Big Man*'s enforced recourse to recognisable, marketable, but therefore also stereotypical images of Scotland. In the case of the latter, the stereotype in question involved masculine rites of passage played out against a west coast, post-industrial, working class backcloth. Moreover, in a wider industrial sense, *Soft Top*'s realistic accommodation with the financial limits of the contemporary British audio-visual market made it a financial model worthy of extended imitation in Scotland: "a slate of low-low-budget movies might just support a real industry"²⁶⁰ of a kind the country had to date conspicuously lacked. In addition, this cycle might conceivably prove one that "dissolves the distinction between 'commercial filmmaking' and 'cultural filmmaking'... a meeting ground"²⁶¹, as opposed to the near-exclusive, publicly subsidised mode of art film production that dominated contemporary Scottish horizons.

Introducing the annus mirabilis: Shallow Grave, Rob Roy and 1995

The hypothetical mode of quasi-Independent local feature production McIntyre called for in the early '90s was anticipated by *Soft Top*. During the mid-decade it was further developed and given a transient imprimatur of industrial authority by *Shallow Grave* and *Trainspotting*. Similarly, the mid- to high-budget model of 'Scottish Classical' cinema exemplified by *The Big Man* would be continued and entrenched by *Rob Roy* during the same period. Yet as well as continuities, we need also to acknowledge crucial differences between *Shallow Grave* and *Rob Roy* and their early '90s antecedents.

²⁵⁹ See McIntyre, 'Vanishing Point...', op. cit., pp. 103 & 108-9: average net domestic receipts for British films in the late '80s/early '90s were £0.8 m, approximately four times the size of *Soft Top*'s production costs.

²⁶⁰ McIntyre, 'Inventing...', op. cit., pg. 19.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

To clarify: in financial and institutional senses, it is difficult to claim *Soft Top* and *The Big Man* as 'Scottish' features. This is so because the entrepreneurial and creative agendas which shaped those films, not to mention the capital which made their production possible, emanated from outwith Scotland, in near-exclusive terms. *Shallow Grave* and *Rob Roy* were also predominantly financed by external capital - Channel 4 (the former), United Artists (the latter). Yet these two films, unlike their predecessors, were projects which in significant part emerged from their makers' association with a range of new Scottish institutional developments and initiatives. Part of the importance these films possess therefore relates to the fact that they mark the point in time at which it became increasingly possible to understand 'Scottish Cinema' not only as a fragmented body of films and filmmakers almost totally bankrolled by external capital. From around 1993 on, that cinema developed an ever-expanding, better capitalised, materially effective local institutional component. This institutional maturation underwrote Scotland's subsequent, contemporarily unexpected ability to support and sustain a swelling continuity of native feature cinema during the latter '90s. Accordingly, while I analyse both *Rob Roy* and *Shallow Grave*'s respective textual representations of 'Scotland', I pay equally extended attention to the institutional context behind the genesis and production of each. Moreover, I argue that, in addition to the agency of individual creative personnel, we can see these films as in part 'authored' by new local institutions (and the ideal type(s) of 'Scottish Cinema' these wished to support or bring into existence).

As the preceding discussion indicates, the early 1990s were not financially propitious times to be an independent film producer in Scotland. Nonetheless, in 1991 Peter Broughan left a full-time position with the drama department at BBC Scotland to go freelance, setting up his own production company, Bronco Films.²⁶² By 1995, *Rob Roy*, a £16m project he originated and eventually co-produced, became the largest ever collaboration between Scottish creative personnel and the vast capital resources of a

²⁶² See Finney, 'Rob Roy', op. cit., pp. 192-3.

Hollywood studio, here United Artists.²⁶³ Almost from the outset, Broughan collaborated on the project with the expatriate Scottish novelist and screenwriter Alan Sharp. Among other acclaimed works, Sharp had authored the script for the classic late western *Ulzana's Raid* (Robert Aldrich, USA, 1972). In Broughan's view, Sharp's successful track record in the American film industry made him "the only choice" for *Rob Roy*; with regards to Scottish screenwriting talent, "there was no one else who had... ultimately the potential confidence of a [Hollywood] studio".²⁶⁴ Sharp rather modestly described his resultant final script for *Rob Roy* as creating "a western with a relatively simple plot structure containing well-defined motives and dynamics".²⁶⁵ The film's director, Michael Caton-Jones - like Sharp, an expatriate who had worked extensively within the mainstream American film industry since graduating from the National Film and Television School in the mid '80s - concurred. He presented *Rob Roy* in contemporary trade press interviews as an attempt to tell "a true Scottish story in the manner of a sweeping Western".²⁶⁶

Rob Roy thus took its place in an established strand within Scottish audiovisual production. This tradition encompassed not simply *The Big Man*, but also earlier features like *Ill Fares the Land* and screenwriter Peter McDougall's '70s and '80s cycle of Glasgow-based television dramas, such as *Just A Boy's Game* (John Mackenzie, GB, 1979).²⁶⁷ In addition, *Rob Roy*'s engagement with the Western possessed a particularly acute, self-referential dimension: the film closely replicates passages of dialogue, scene structure and imagery from Classic studio westerns such as *Shane* (George Stevens, USA, 1953), and also from Sharp's own Hollywood *oeuvre* (a point elaborated more fully in my subsequent textual analysis).²⁶⁸ *Rob Roy* is notable for the almost absolute disjunction between the nature of its industrial and cultural contributions to Scottish cinema's development. The film remains unprecedented in the scale of local creative personnel's

²⁶³ Eddie Dyja (ed.), *The BFI Film and Television Handbook 1996* (London: BFI, 1995), pg. 28.

²⁶⁴ Quoted in Finney, 'Rob Roy', op. cit., pg. 195.

²⁶⁵ Quoted in Richard Mowe, 'There's big money in sheep stealing', in *British Film*, n. 1 (Summer 1995), pg. 8.

²⁶⁶ Caton-Jones quoted in Allan Hunter, 'Rob Roy', in *Screen International*, n. 985 (25/11/94), pg. 23.

²⁶⁷ See Kenny Mathieson, 'Peter McDougall: An Endless Boy's Game', in *Cencrastus*, n. 28 (Winter 1987/8), pp. 1-4.

²⁶⁸ See David Hall, *From scenes like these? Essays on Scottish Historical Films* (Cameron Press, 1999 [no place of publication given]), pp. 14-5; 23.

financial achievement, yet arguably bound to precedent in the representational strategies it employs to construct national identity and history in particular ways, Scotland “called upon to revive the values of the tired old Western, rediscovered yet again... as a frontier territory perched on the edge of Europe”.²⁶⁹

The roots of *Shallow Grave*, like those of *Rob Roy*, can be traced to a speculative collaboration between screenwriter (John Hodge) and producer (Andrew Macdonald). Hodge first showed MacDonald a draft script when the two men met at the 1991 Edinburgh International Film Festival. The pair subsequently secured £1m of production monies for the project from Channel 4 and the Glasgow Film Fund, established in 1993 to dispense annual funds of £150 000 to feature projects shooting in Glasgow and the city’s immediate environs.²⁷⁰ *Shallow Grave*’s eventual commercial success dwarfed that even of *Rob Roy*, relatively speaking. It attracted around 1.5 million domestic cinema admissions, took £5.1 m at the UK box office alone, and was thus the most domestically successful British film of 1995.²⁷¹

Like Broughan and Sharp, MacDonald and Hodge looked to American cinematic precedents for inspiration on *Shallow Grave*, yet drawing from the contemporary Independent scene rather than the Classical Studio era. In a trade press interview coincident with *Shallow Grave*’s domestic cinema release, MacDonald explained the creative rationale behind, and debts incurred by, the project:

Take a film like *sex, lies and videotape*. The entire film really only involves three people and three locations. Soderburgh used that to his advantage to create a style... That was the reason for setting almost the entire film in one location. We knew we only

²⁶⁹ John Caughie, ‘Small Pleasures: Adaptation and the Past in British Film and Television’, in Anelise Reich Corseuil (ed.), *Ilha Do Desterro (Film, Literature and History Special Issue)*, n. 32, (1st semester 1997), pg. 32.

²⁷⁰ See Angus Finney, ‘*Trainspotting*: The new team approach’, in Finney, *State...*, op. cit., pp. 173-75.

²⁷¹ For details, see Robert Murphy, ‘Popular British Cinema’, in *Journal of Popular British Cinema*, n. 1 (1998), pg. 6; Dyja (ed.), *BFI Film and Television Handbook 1997*, op. cit., pg. 37.

had £1m, so we had to work it so that we could have good production values and a good style.²⁷²

As with Caton-Jones and *Rob Roy*, *Shallow Grave*'s director, Danny Boyle, came to the project only after a shooting script had been developed by writer and producer. He also proved similarly supportive of his colleagues' 'transatlantic' creative allegiances. Boyle overtly distanced both himself and this film from a rather caricatured subjective vision of a "patronising" British cinema which "keep[s] trying to recreate *Play for Today*", favouring self-indulgent politicking over the need to "get a kid and his girlfriend or her boyfriend into the cinema on a Friday night".²⁷³

Shallow Grave, like *Rob Roy*, also manifested an absolute disjunction between the nature of its industrial and cultural contributions to the development of Scottish cinema. But *Shallow Grave*'s disjunction proved the mirror image of that made by *Rob Roy*. In terms of its production budget's size and provenance, *Shallow Grave* conformed, industrially speaking, to the familiar, externally and publicly funded production model that had predominated within Scottish film culture since the 1970s. In contrast to the unprecedented international commercial ambitions of *Rob Roy*'s creative team, the makers and funders of *Shallow Grave* professed more modest aspirations. These were broadly in line with Steve McIntyre's ideal model of low-budget, sustainable Scottish and/or British feature production able to recoup costs domestically. In 1997, Andrew Macdonald complained that "the one thing I don't think we get enough recognition for" was his creative team's conscious decision to produce "films... made for the British market... the only way you'll ever have any kind of British film industry".²⁷⁴ *Shallow Grave*'s major metropolitan patron, David Aukin, Commissioning Editor for Drama at Channel 4, concurred. Speaking at the 1995 Toronto Film Festival, Aukin argued that, "probably the most significant film we commissioned in [the early '90s] was *Shallow*

²⁷² Quoted in Nolan Fell, 'Deeply Shallow: Interview with Andrew MacDonald', in *Rushes*, (Jan/Feb 1995), pg. 20.

²⁷³ Quoted in Ronan Bennett, 'Lean, Mean and Cruel: Interview with Danny Boyle', in *Sight & Sound*, Vol. 5, 1 (Jan 1995), pp. 35-36

²⁷⁴ Quoted in Lucy Johnson (ed.), *Talking Pictures: Interviews with Contemporary British Filmmakers* (London: BFI, 1997), pg. 89.

Grave, which was shown first in the UK and recovered its production costs within the UK. That is the basis of a healthy film industry".²⁷⁵

Yet if *Shallow Grave* was thus far more closely bound to industrial precedent than *Rob Roy*, the images of national identity and culture it constructed seemed far less familiar to contemporary onlookers. Initial reaction to *Rob Roy* often argued that the film reiterated a historically well-established 'mountain and flood' image of Scotland, a "useful backdrop for tales of authentic, primitive redemption".²⁷⁶ By contrast, commentary on *Shallow Grave* most often proposed that the film's aesthetic signature and representation of nation bore almost or absolutely no relation to anything previously seen in Scottish cinema, "images of contemporary Scotland [that] had little direct connections with established cinematic and televisual traditions, rejecting both Celtic romanticism and naturalistic grit".²⁷⁷ Indeed, some contemporary observers were bemused and disquieted by this apparently clean representational break from the past, seeing *Shallow Grave* as wholly lacking "a degree of Scottishness to its character".²⁷⁸ This complex interplay of similarities and differences between *Rob Roy* and *Shallow Grave* provides a guide to understanding the two films' significance for, and marked influence over, the Scottish cinema which rapidly emerged in their wake.

Appropriating America: Rob Roy and the tartan western

Historiographic, literary and mythological accounts of the life of Robert Roy MacGregor (1671 - 1734) abound. Alan Sharp acknowledged W. H. Murray's biography as the dominant influence on his script for the 1995 film *Rob Roy*.²⁷⁹ Both script and film draw their substance from Murray's detailed analysis of the troubled relations between

²⁷⁵ Quoted in Gerald Peary (ed.), 'Channel 4: Broadcasters Support Filmmakers', in *Kinema*, (Fall 1996), @ <http://www.kinema.uwaterloo.ca/gpc4-962.htm> <accessed 15/9/05>; see also Aukin's comments about *Shallow Grave* in Duncan Petrie (ed.), *Inside Stories: Diaries of British filmmakers at Work* (London: BFI, 1996), pg. 3.

²⁷⁶ Patrick Kane, 'Me Tartan, you chained to the past', in *The Guardian*, (18/5/95), *Features* section, pg. 12.

²⁷⁷ Petrie, *Screening...*, op. cit., pg. 196.

²⁷⁸ Robert McCall, 'Shallow Grave - A worthy standard-bearer for Scotland?', in *Scottish Film*, n. 9 (3rd Quarter 1994), pg. 17.

²⁷⁹ "Rob Roy revealed by Murray was the one I wished to portray". Quoted in Hall, op. cit., pg. 3; see W. H. Murray, *Rob Roy MacGregor: His life and times, 2nd Edition* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1995).

MacGregor and the Duke of Montrose in the period immediately preceding the 1715 Jacobite Rebellion. In Sharp's fictionalised version of events, Rob contracts a £1000 loan from Montrose, in order to co-finance a speculative cattle droving venture. Rob does not wish to profit from the new mercantile, individualist culture associated with the emergent British state and identity personified by the Duke. Rather, he wishes to meet a traditional patriarchal obligation, providing for the collective security of his clan unit, "the two hundred souls under my protection". This high-minded, socialistic venture is sabotaged when Montrose's treacherous retainers, Cunninghame and Cullearn, steal the money, killing and framing Rob's lieutenant, the would-be emigrant MacDonald. The ensuing feud between Rob and Montrose involves the extirpation of the MacGregors and the rape of Rob's wife, Mary, by Cunninghame. Matters are resolved 'honourably' only by Rob's killing of Cunninghame in a duel sponsored by the Duke of Argyll, Montrose's political opponent.

Critical reaction to *Rob Roy*'s version of the 'Classical Scottish Western' proved as hostile as that which previously greeted *The Big Man*. As in the case of the latter film, most commentators on *Rob Roy* have stressed what they see as the fundamental cultural inappropriateness of using 'foreign' film generic and mythic modes to re-narrate and -imagine the nature and significance of key events and personages from Scottish history. A properly nuanced understanding and representation of local specificity is erased or distorted, "our past... surrendered... to Hollywood and its pale shadows in Cowcaddens and Queen Margaret Drive".²⁸⁰ Granted, *Rob Roy*'s painstakingly deliberate "replac[ement] of Native America with Native Scotia"²⁸¹ may have been remarkably effective in allowing local creative personnel to form lucrative working relationships with US studio capital, but it also had unacceptably regressive ideological consequences. Scottish culture and history are, it was argued, reduced to little more than a transient form of product differentiation, at the beck and call of the industrial dictates of the American film industry and the ideological anxieties and interests of American cinema audiences, rather than their Scottish counterparts. For James R. Keller, ostensible signs of local

²⁸⁰ Edward J. Cowan, *Scottish History and Scottish Folk: Inaugural Lecture, Chair of Scottish History and Literature, University of Glasgow, 15 March 1995* (Glasgow: University of Glasgow, 1998), pg. 3.

²⁸¹ Kane, op. cit.

specificity and identity in *Rob Roy* are no more than a flimsy pretext for the recycling of ideologies central to American, not Scottish, culture and identity, namely, “American family values and traditional masculinity”.²⁸² Similarly, Martin Price argued that *Rob Roy* addressed itself to “a void that goes beyond the Scottish/English border... an absence of heroic leaders in popular culture”.²⁸³ Analogously, if with more leniency, Brian Woolland proposes that the film attempts to create a “reworked Western that uses the genre to examine resistance to colonialism”, but that it ultimately regresses into “a grand romantic fantasy that is given a historical setting”.²⁸⁴ The consensus seems to be that *Rob Roy*’s sophisticated entrepreneurialism may have benefited the film’s individual makers in financial and career terms, but it does little for the ideological health of the wider Scottish culture from which they hailed.

Yet for my own forthcoming textual analysis, the most salient point about *Rob Roy* is not that it demonstrates that Scottish adaptation and application of American cinematic precedents is a near-automatically regressive phenomenon, ideologically speaking. The most pressing problem is less the fact of the film’s hybridised, ‘Scottish-American’ representation of national history, itself the product of a comparably mixed ‘Scottish-American’ cinema practice, and more that *Rob Roy* works strenuously to disavow these central defining characteristics. *Rob Roy* might be described as a ‘closeted’ film. It is a material product of US-influenced local cultural proclivities, the existence and/or desirability of which the text itself vigorously denies. Despite its own marked generic and industrial heterogeneity, *Rob Roy* valorises a Scottish identity ‘pure’ and ‘ideal’ precisely because it rejects extended intercourse with ‘alien’ cultural traditions and influences.

Moreover, criticism also needs to be alert to the numerous facets of *Rob Roy*’s hybrid, ‘Scottish-American’ industrial and creative identity. The influence of the Western has been repeatedly acknowledged (not least by the film’s makers). Largely neglected, however, is the fact that enthusiastic local accession to commercially orthodox models of

²⁸²James. R. Keller, ‘Masculinity and Marginality in *Rob Roy* and *Braveheart*’, in *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, Vol. 24. 4 (Winter 1997), pg. 147.

²⁸³ Martin Price, ‘Letter: Scottish Popular Heroes’, in *Sight & Sound*, Vol. 6. 2 (Feb 1996), pg. 64.

²⁸⁴ Brian Woolland, ‘*Rob Roy*: Man in the middle’, in *Jump Cut*, n. 43 (July 2000), pg. 31.

script structure and writing associated with the mainstream American film industry forms an equally central determining influence upon *Rob Roy*'s preferred construction of national identity and history. In this regard, the interest of Alan Sharp's above-quoted description of his script for *Rob Roy* lies not simply in its acknowledgement of a particular US generic bloodline ('a western') but also in the avowedly technocratic rhetoric used to conceptualise 'successful' screenwriting *per se* ('a relatively simple plot structure containing well-defined motives and dynamics').

Sharp and Broughan's pronounced, entrepreneurial local interest in deploying commercially sanctioned models of screenwriting 'good practice' - "we worked through the script and drove it steadily towards commercialism in the sense that it had to be something somebody would be interested in funding"²⁸⁵ - was not peculiar to *Rob Roy*. Within Scottish film culture from the early '90s on, scripts and 'stories' came to be primarily understood as (ideally speaking) economic units with well-defined, relatively stable exchange values. Typically, in 1994 Eddie Dick, Chief Officer of the Scottish Film Production Fund, enthusiastically proposed an ideation of screenwriting practice more closely aligned with received notions of business, as opposed to creative, practice: "a script is the best precondition of a film... the means by which the value of a film not yet made can be estimated".²⁸⁶ As we shall see from consideration of *Rob Roy*, *Shallow Grave*, and subsequently, much post '95 Scottish cinema, such local beliefs became increasingly hegemonic as the '90s wore on. Returning to my specific focus on *Rob Roy*, I discuss first the influence of orthodox scriptwriting practice, before going on to consider the film's curious disavowal of hybrid, transatlantic elements to Scottish culture and identity past or present, despite the fact that it itself is a direct product of such phenomena.

While it is well-known that the eventual size of the production financing package successfully assembled for *Rob Roy* was unprecedented within Scottish film culture to

²⁸⁵ Sharp quoted in Mowe, *op. cit.*

²⁸⁶ Eddie Dick, 'Poor Wee Scottish Cinema', in *Scottish Film*, n. 10 (4th Quarter 1994), pg. 21.

that point, so too was the length and cost (4 years and c. £0.1m²⁸⁷) of the project's script development. The cost of this was largely underwritten by local public funding bodies. For example, a £15 000 SFPP script development grant was, in 1992, then the organisation's largest ever.²⁸⁸ In 1990, the outgoing SFPP Chair, Ian Lockerbie, had explained the organisation's concentration of its funding activities in the area of script development in pragmatic and defensive terms. Given the paucity of financial resources at its disposal, the Fund found it "difficult to play a pro-active rather than a reactive role in commissioning work".²⁸⁹ However, between 1990 and 1995, the typical tenor of local institutional pronouncements on script development funding changed from one of bashful apology ('it's all we can afford') to brash aspiration. A key part of Scottish cinema's collective self-reorientation from 'European' to 'American' modes of industrial and creative practice during this period involved the re-conceptualisation of script development as the "fundamental bedrock to subsequent film activities"²⁹⁰, rather than a poor cousin to the 'real' business of film production. Angus Finney, for example, argued that the international commercial hegemony of the American film industry could in part be traced to the fact it had until now invested in script development more generously (c. 7% of total capital resources) than its European competitors (c. 1-2%).²⁹¹

Significantly, Peter Broughan's initial trip to meet Alan Sharp (who at that point in time was resident in New Zealand) in order to engage him as writer for *Rob Roy* was part-financed by the Scottish Export Assistance Scheme, an international marketing body for Scottish industrialists. The ideation of screenwriting as a 'business' rather than 'artistic' practice underwriting Broughan's vital journey was one that reflected his own filmmaking priorities and interests. Broughan's retrospective gloss on *Rob Roy*'s extended development process is instructive here:

The most exciting and rewarding stage of the producing process
is when you have the idea yourself. You then engage a writer,

²⁸⁷ For details, see Finney, 'Rob Roy', op. cit., pp. 192-202.

²⁸⁸ Geoffrey Macnab, 'Highland Reels', in *Moving Pictures International*, n. 8 (Apr 1995), pg. 24.

²⁸⁹ Lockerbie, op. cit., pg. 175.

²⁹⁰ Angus Finney, 'SCRIPT puts emphasis on development activity', in *Scottish Film*, n. 16 (1996), pg. 6.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

and spend time bringing that idea into script reality. From my point of view, things become relatively less interesting after that stage is successfully completed and the project has moved into production.²⁹²

Symptomatic of broader institutional and creative developments within early '90s Scotland, 'creativity' in Broughan's rhetoric becomes (both figuratively and literally) about the 'business' of pre-fabricating feature films as attractive investment packages for external capital. While a slightly earlier 'tartan western' such as *The Big Man* used the Western's generic form and mythic archetype in order to broach local cultural and political concerns—however unsuccessfully—*Rob Roy* used the same forms largely because they provided a commercially attractive narrative exoskeleton for prospective funders. This had far-reaching consequences for the film's ability to construct complex, let alone progressive, images of national identity and history, which prove increasingly absent as *Rob Roy*'s narrative progresses.

The centrality of script structure (the word as written) to *Rob Roy*'s development and production is carried over into the film's central thematic concerns, via the symbolic weight attached to the concept of the pledge (the word as both spoken and given). Yet this crossover proves self-contradictory and misleading in nature. For Broughan and Sharp, *written* words—script structure and content—prove necessarily malleable, due to a fervent wish to satisfy free mercantile forces, the requirements of US studio capital. Yet for the version of Rob that results from such pragmatic local concession, the *spoken* word is immovable, especially when conceived of as a pledge. For MacGregor, 'a man's word' is the fundamental marker of an individual, and by extension national, identity characterised by its principled refusal to compromise what director Michael Caton-Jones termed "certain inviolable beliefs"²⁹³, the "socialist work ethic" that "we... all grew up with in this country"²⁹⁴, ones diametrically opposed to precisely the kind of externally controlled capitalist institutions and imperatives assiduously courted by the character's

²⁹² Quoted in Finney, 'Rob Roy', op. cit., pg. 192.

²⁹³ Quoted in Mowe, op. cit., pg. 7.

²⁹⁴ Caton-Jones quoted in Anon, 'Rob Roy', in *Time Out*, (21/12/04-4/1/95), pg. 36.

own creators. As Liz Lochhead notes, the key problem with the heroic, anti-modern, anti-capital depiction of individual and national identity foregrounded by *Rob Roy* is not its lachrymose self-congratulation, “lying about the past”. Rather, it is the fact that such ‘lying’ images work tirelessly to cover up all evidence of the contemporary material and ideological reasons for, and terms of, their own preferred depictions of Scottish history, “truths about the present we are hiding from ourselves”.²⁹⁵

The terms in which Rob and Montrose seal their loan, which forms the central hinge to the film’s narrative, reveals much about the reductive approach to national history and identity dictated by enthusiastic local accession to industrially orthodox models of script structure in *Rob Roy*. Rob refuses Montrose surety for the money lent, characteristically arguing that, “when my word is given it is good.” Despite his wife Mary’s misgivings (she accuses him of being “business partner with Montrose”) and the Duke’s mockery (“a man of property intent on growing richer: we have more in common than I thought”), Rob blindly refuses to see himself as entering into a symptomatically modern, impersonal economic contract (alien importation) rather than a traditional, personalised, masculine bond of honour (authentic native effusion).

This fact ultimately proves convenient for filmmakers aiming to produce a Scottish historical epic more concerned with conformation to established generic/commercial precedent than attention to historiographical nuance. As Lochhead puts it, *Rob Roy* is a “not-very-burdened-with-history Historical Movie”.²⁹⁶ Rob’s wilful demurral of the social and historical complexity and fluidity that surrounds him, in this specific instance, the initial stages of post-1707 Scotland’s gradual political, economic and ideological envelopment by a wider British State formation, plausibly motivates the film’s own neat circumvention of the same issues. For example, the first narrative meeting between the Dukes of Argyll and Montrose sees the latter trying to goad the former with “news from court”, the secession crisis around the childless Queen Anne (1665 - 1714) and looming Jacobite rebellion. Argyll is dismissive: “you talk too much, man - attend to your wager”.

²⁹⁵ Liz Lochhead, ‘The Shadow’, in *Sight & Sound*, Vol. 5. 6 (Jun 1995), pg. 16.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

Attention immediately re-focuses on the source of the bet Argyll refers to, a swordfight taking place between the two aristocrats' retainers, Cunninghame and Guthrie (swordplay replaces shootout in *Rob Roy*'s tartan western).²⁹⁷ The amount of expository dialogue required to produce a relatively elaborated historical context ('too much talk') would disrupt the paramount imperative of replicating commercial Hollywood cinema's streamlined narrative form and drive. Detailed consideration of local historical context is silenced, literally so in Montrose's case. *Rob Roy* instead 'attends' to the question of Scotland and England's historic relationship though a reductive recourse to Western-style physical action and symbolic ritual combat, a duel between two men whose respective masculinities, particularly in their sexual aspects - heterosexual/Scottish vs. effeminate/homosexual/English²⁹⁸ - reductively and regressively personify what are proposed as wholly antipathetic national identities.

This scene's exploration and definition of national identity, whether Scottish or English/British, through a rhetorical and physical opposition of competing masculine identities and bodies is of a piece with *Rob Roy*'s central strategy for representing national-historical experience throughout. Rob and Montrose oppose authentic/feudal/communal/socialist/Highland/Scottish, and alien/modern/individualistic/capitalist/Lowland/British identities. Argyll and Rob personify an ethnically and geographically secure Scottish identity, one resistant to the possibilities of national cultural incorporation and/or hybridisation set in train by the 1707 Union; Montrose and MacDonald counterpoint this with a physically and ideologically peripatetic alternative, actively seeking out the financial opportunities slowly unleashed after this date. This latter opposition echoes Christopher Harvie's famous binaristic division of post-union Scottish society and identity into opposing camps of 'Black' and 'Red' Scots.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁷ Hall argues that references to wider historical context in this and other exchanges between the two Dukes are so fragmentary that they confuse, rather than clarify, audience understanding of the events and personalities referred to. Hall, op. cit., pp. 22-3.

²⁹⁸ See Keller, op. cit., pp. 147.

²⁹⁹ See Christopher Harvie, *Scotland and Nationalism: Scottish society and politics, 1707-1977* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1977).

Much like Argyll and Montrose's successive wagers on episodes of armed one-on-one male combat, *Rob Roy*'s internationally marketable image of Scottish history and identity is therefore a deliberately speculative affair. This is so in a dual sense. Firstly, the film utilises American cinema's mythic and generic archetypes in order to narrativise and reify isolated actual events and personages from Scottish history (hard sell) into the stuff of romantic legend (soft sell). As Alan Sharp blithely admitted, what necessarily results is a *Rob Roy* "no more accurate than Walter Scott's version... or Disney's for that matter".³⁰⁰ This 'Scottish-American' approach to the Heritage film seems clearly opposed to what was at the time the typically mimetic attention to period authenticity and social nuance found in the English/British features which dominated the cycle.³⁰¹ That divergence was due to *Rob Roy*'s makers' desire to engage a mass audience on an international scale, as opposed to the niche metropolitan arthouse markets courted by Merchant Ivory and their concelebrants. Secondly, therefore, such vaulting commercial ambition could only be achieved through the success of a novel industrial 'speculation' on the part of local filmmakers struggling against the constraints imposed by Scotland's traditionally underdeveloped production sector. As a major projected collaboration between local talent and an international studio's vast capital and technical resources on a hitherto unexperienced scale, what BBC Scotland Head of Drama Andrea Calderwood proudly termed "a Scottish-created, but Hollywood-backed, historical epic"³⁰², *Rob Roy* is itself an audacious local industrial analogue of one of Argyll's many 'wagers to be attended to'.

It is clear, then, that *Rob Roy*'s various engagements with American cinematic precedents relating to genre and script have a significant and problematic impact upon the way in which this film represents national history and identity. Equally significant and problematic, however, is the extent to which the narrative workings of the text itself—in direct contradiction to the public statements of its key creative personnel—seek to

³⁰⁰ Quoted in Anon, 'Rob Roy', op. cit., pg. 36.

³⁰¹ See Andrew Higson, 'The Heritage Film and British Cinema', in Higson (ed.), *Dissolving Views: Key Writings on British Cinema* (London: Cassell, 1996), pg. 233; Lochhead, op. cit., pg. 15; Harlan Kennedy, 'Kiltspotting: Highland Reels', in *Film Comment*, Vol. 32. 4 (Jul/Aug 1996), pp. 29-31.

³⁰² Andrea Calderwood, 'Film and Television Policy in Scotland', in John Hill & Martin McLoone (eds.), *Big Picture, Small Screen: The Relations Between Film and Television* (Luton: John Libbey Media/University of Luton, 1996), pg. 188.

conceal and naturalise the very existence, let alone the mixed national cultural consequences, of such novel, entrepreneurial engagements in the first instance. Symptomatically, within *Rob Roy*'s diegesis, numerous characters harbouring economic aspirations comparable to those of the filmmakers—in terms of entrepreneurial mobility and/or the attraction of American culture—are punished for the complicating critique their desires imply of the static, univocal (and therefore marketable) “particularly Scottish” identity Rob embodies, one Michael Caton-Jones proudly claimed was suffused with “a benign humanity”.³⁰³

For example, the metropolitan mercenary Cunninghame's Anglophone, quite literally rapacious individualism ensures that, in his own words, *Rob Roy*'s imagined ‘Scotland’ is a country which “does not agree with me”. However, the former's sentiments prove not simply an imported, alien aberration, but also those of “a great many of us, sir”, as assented to by the comparably unscrupulous, but problematically native, Cullearn. As *Rob Roy*'s narrative progresses, these ‘great many’ individual rogue elements are ritually expelled from the national culture in order to confirm, rather than complicate, the latter's essential and universal identity as personified by Rob.³⁰⁴ Rob's younger brother, Alasdair, drowns Cullearn; Bessie, Cunninghame's pregnant servant lover who begs to be taken “anywhere-away from here”, hangs herself; Rob kills Cunninghame; Montrose, a treacherous North Briton who bets in “English pounds” as opposed to Argyll's “Scotch guineas”, is bereaved when the dead Cunninghame is revealed as his illegitimate son.

The most interesting example of this recurrent motif, however, is *Rob Roy*'s treatment of a much more sympathetic character, the would-be emigrant MacDonald. The latter's discourse forms a strikingly direct diegetic analogue to that publicly professed by the film's creators. Like Broughan, Sharp and Caton-Jones, MacDonald's character privileges individual entrepreneurialism. Like his creators, he too therefore attempts a speculative engagement with the economic opportunities associated with American

³⁰³ Caton-Jones quoted in Anon, ‘Rob Roy’, op. cit., pg. 36.

³⁰⁴ See Kim Newman, ‘Review: *Rob Roy*’, in *Sight and Sound*, Vol. 5. 6 (Jun 1995), pg. 52: “any action or motive that might make [Rob] flawed (or even interesting) is displaced onto stooges like the luckless Alasdair [Rob's younger brother] and the cheery MacDonald”.

culture. From very early in *Rob Roy*'s narrative, it is made clear that MacDonald is intent upon emigration across the Atlantic, a course he urges Rob to follow (with predictably little success). Cullearn's observation that MacDonald is "always dreaming of the Americas" is of course equally applicable to his creators. Yet the possibility of the enabling cross-cultural exchange and self-transformation MacDonald desires is systematically denied by the film's narrative, despite the fact that it itself materially resulted from a similar process. Transformative and variegated elements within the national culture portrayed by *Rob Roy* must be destroyed or explained away, in the paramount drive to create a monotone, and therefore easily consumable, image of 'authentic' Scottish identity.

One implied rationalisation offered for MacDonald's aberrant desire to fly the native nest is that he was always something of an ethnic cuckoo in it, anyway. Despite his status as Rob's most trusted ally and confidant, MacDonald is from the outset partially excluded from the organic, mono-ethnic national 'clan' Rob symbolises: quite simply, he is not a MacGregor by birth. Yet more tellingly, the formal excess of the narrative sequence in which Macdonald's death at the hands of Cunninghame occurs is indicative of the ideological strain inherent in *Rob Roy*'s attempted denial of both the presence or legitimacy of dynamic, transformative elements within the Scottish culture and identity it depicts. Cunninghame's nocturnal ambush is intercut with a ceilidh staged by Rob to celebrate the successful conclusion of the loan with Montrose. MacDonald's fatal separation from the communal body (when killed, he is travelling back alone to the clan bearing the loaned money) is ostensibly a matter of his bad luck and Cullearn and Cunninghame's treachery. Yet the fatal aspect of MacDonald's personal isolation is markedly underscored by increasingly rapid crosscutting between images of his vulnerable solitude and the communal security (and by extension, traditional, shared national identity) he himself wishes to transform or leave behind. MacDonald's pausing at a crossroads indicating routes back to the Clan and to Greenock, his proposed embarkation point for the Americas, indicates his already divergent path from clan/national community, values and identity; the tragic consequences of this ensue immediately. In a final, richly over-determined twist to his punishment for 'un-Scottish'

entrepreneurial and transatlantic aspirations, MacDonald's death is effected when Cunninghame skewers him to a tree in which the former has vainly attempted to hide Rob's money. The would-be Scottish-American is thus literally and ideologically pinned by the text to both the geographical and symbolic contours of the national territory he, like his assailant, "cannot wait to leave." A similar theme, the textual problematising and punishment of central protagonists defined by their desire to transcend and leave behind the constraints of the Scotland they inhabit only under sufferance, is foregrounded in *Shallow Grave*, albeit to very different representational effect in a mid '90s 'Scottish-American' movie whose relationship with *Rob Roy* is defined, as already indicated above, by a complex amalgam of similarities and differences.

American Independence: Shallow Grave and Independent cinema

Shallow Grave's narrative predominantly centres on three central characters and a single narrative location. Arrogant young professionals Alex, David and Juliet share a luxurious apartment in Edinburgh's New Town. They share privileged socio-economic status and a cynical disdain for the wider world outside their rarefied ambit. Tellingly, they are first seen interviewing and ritually humiliating unfortunate applicants for the flat's spare room. This they eventually let to Hugo, a mysterious, affluent writer. Hugo promptly dies in bed from a drug overdose, leaving behind him no contact details and a large bag of money. Overcome by greed, the three decide to split this. They mutilate Hugo's body, removing all its identifying features, and bury the cadaver in nearby woods. The plan unravels when Hugo's criminal accomplices and the police respectively trace both money and body back to the flat. Guilt, mistrust and, in David's case, psychosis destroy the flatmates' relationship. Juliet kills David and pins Alex to the kitchen floor with a knife while attempting to flee the country with the money. As the police arrive, the audience discovers that Alex has in fact hidden this from the others underneath the same floorboards he is violently secured to.

Like *Rob Roy*, *Shallow Grave* was clearly both product and precipitant of an emergent entrepreneurial, transatlantic self-transformation prosecuted within early '90s Scottish

film culture. The latter film's representation of present-day Scotland is definitively shaped, like the former film's depiction of the national past, by its creators' enthusiastic and deliberate adoption of US cinematic precedents relating to genre and script structure. As noted above, Andrew Macdonald proclaimed *Shallow Grave* to be a Scottish scion of 1980s and early '90s American Independent cinema. In terms yet broader, director Danny Boyle proclaimed himself to be an 'imagined American', in terms of his cinematic allegiances and reference points, proclaiming that, "fed on a diet of American or international landscapes... Britain feels slightly mundane by comparison".³⁰⁵ Accordingly, *Shallow Grave*'s structuring narrative device, that of the introduction of events and characters by a central protagonist who turns out to be already dead (David appears to be resting in bed at the end of the film's opening titles, but its final scene reveals that his body is lying on a mortuary slab) borrows from American cinema in terms much wider than simply Macdonald's publicly professed admiration for contemporary Independents; here, Classic Hollywood is approvingly invoked, through self-conscious local quotation from and adaptation of the opening sequence of *Sunset Boulevard* (Billy Wilder, USA, 1950).³⁰⁶

Critical response to *Shallow Grave* was and remains divided in certain regards. For many, one of the film's most problematic aspects was its makers' uncompromising, provocative declaration of allegiance to 'foreign' cinematic traditions and their attendant rejection of domestic counterparts. Certainly, *Shallow Grave*'s success as an entrepreneurial proposition, its "sophisticated urban aesthetic... [creating] the perfect commercial package"³⁰⁷, has quite understandably remained above question. In addition, there exists a near-unanimous acceptance that this film and its box office performance acted as a crucial industrial fillip for Scottish cinema more generally. In 1993, when *Shallow Grave* began its production shoot in Glasgow, a Glasgow Film Fund press release euphorically proclaimed that "Glasgow today took a giant step towards becoming an international

³⁰⁵ Quoted in Keith Hopper, 'Interview with Danny Boyle', in *Film West*, n. 24 (Spring 1996), pg. 24.

³⁰⁶ Philip Kemp draws attention to *Shallow Grave*'s debt to Billy Wilder. See Kemp, 'Shallow Grave: Review', in *Sight & Sound*, Vol. 5.1 (Jan 1995), pg. 57.

³⁰⁷ Petrie, *Screening...*, op. cit., pg. 196.

centre for film production”.³⁰⁸ As striking as the hyperbole here is the extent to which later observers proposed that it was subsequently justified. In 1997, Ruth Wishart argued that on the back of box office successes like *Shallow Grave*, at long last “the film business was being taken seriously as precisely that: a potentially important part of the Scottish economy”.³⁰⁹ In 1999, Brian Pendereigh went further, arguing that, “the makers of *Shallow Grave* created Any City in Scotland... in doing so they kick-started the Scottish film industry”.³¹⁰ Yet other commentators have argued that the creative conception and institutional support of *Shallow Grave* as a commercial, rather than cultural, proposition had unwelcome, even inevitable, consequences for its (in)ability to act as a complex representation of local society and identity. Tellingly, both supportive and hostile responses have proved in near-unanimous agreement that this feature’s identity as a ‘Scottish’ film, and its connection to Scottish cultural traditions and issues, are tenuous at best.

Indeed, *Shallow Grave*’s best-known scene, its opening title sequence, appears to gleefully proclaim as much. As the introductory credits roll, audiences are taken on a fast-motion, low-panning journey round the distinctive architecture and urban layout of Edinburgh’s New Town, while a narrative voiceover, revealed to be that of David, one of the three flatmates, asserts that, “this could be any city- they’re all the same”. This apparently self-willed anonymity troubled some. Robert McCall, while praising *Shallow Grave*’s creative and commercial accomplishment, argued that scant domestic production funds and institutional energies should take as their first priority, “Scottish projects... of genuine cultural merit and significance to Scotland”; McCall took it as axiomatic that,

unless a film... at least reflects a genuine aspect of Scotland’s character, culture, people and aspirations, then its long term future effect upon, and benefits for, Scottish film culture, are likely to be severely limited.³¹¹

³⁰⁸ Quoted in Robert McCall, ‘Opinion’, in *Scottish Film and Visual Arts*, n.5 (3rd Quarter, 1993), pg. 5.

³⁰⁹ Ruth Wishart, ‘Lights, camera and a piece of the action, please’, in *The Herald*, (27/1/97), pg. 13.

³¹⁰ Brian Pendreigh, ‘Northern Lights, Camera, Action’, in *The Guardian*, (5/2/99), *Review* section, pg. 12.

³¹¹ McCall, ‘*Shallow Grave*’, op. cit., pg. 17.

The implication here, of course, was that *Shallow Grave* was a project which just happened to be made in Scotland, rather than a 'Scottish film' marked by distinctively local aesthetics, narrative content and/or thematic concerns; as such, the film might prove of long term benefit to no-one other than its individual makers.

Moreover, such contemporary domestic perceptions of *Shallow Grave* as 'cuckoo in the nest' extended beyond the content and visual style of the film itself to the manner in which it was locally part-funded. As noted above, while Channel 4 was the major financial patron of this project, £0.15m was also contributed by an infant local production funder, the Glasgow Film Fund, established in January 1993 as a six-month pilot scheme with available production monies of £0.15m. Indeed, long before the film was completed and shown to audiences *Shallow Grave* had already courted local controversy, by completing its funding package by securing the GFF's entire first annual budget in a single funding award.³¹²

Shallow Grave might be read as a film produced almost wholly in its junior funder's emergent institutional self-image. That film and its makers ostentatiously acknowledged American creative influences, and questioned the assumption that a film made and/or funded in Scotland should automatically privilege the exploration and representation of Scottish cultural specificity. Similarly, both the very creation and institutional rationale of the GFF were primarily indebted to US institutional precedents. The GFF replicated American local government incentive schemes, most specifically the New York Film Office. The organisation eventually became in the eyes of certain industry observers, "arguably the most competitive and pro-active [film office in the UK]... a true industry office".³¹³ This 'truly' industrial remit hinged on the fact that, breaking from the collective precedent set by its domestic predecessors, the GFF announced from its inception that it would support feature projects without any reference to their Scottish-specific content, or the nationality of the creative personnel involved. The sole funding

³¹² McCall, 'Opinion', op. cit., pg. 5.

³¹³ Charles Hewitt, 'Scot Aid: aka the Glasgow Film Office', in *Eye-piece*, Vol. 20. 3 (Jun/Jul 1999), pg. 20. My insert.

criterion involved in early GFF funding decisions was one of financial scale. Only feature projects budgeted over £0.5m were eligible to apply for grants of up to 30% of their production costs. The understanding was that films budgeted over a certain scale would inject amounts of production-related spend into the Glasgow economy far in excess of the financial incentive required to bring filmmakers to the city in the first instance. This institutional conception of cinema, as a contributing agent to post-industrial urban regeneration, rather than an important but under-supported area of contemporary Scottish cultural production, reflected the fact that European, local government and regional economic development agencies had funded GFF's creation without financial input from Scottish cultural institutions.³¹⁴

Accordingly, GFF's organisational replication of specific US film institutional structures was quickly understood by contemporary observers to also entail the adoption of corresponding, though more diffuse, industrial *strictures* popularly associated with mainstream American cinema: film production conceived as an economically, not culturally, significant activity for Scotland. Unsurprisingly, representatives of the GFF presented this as a positive development. The GFF's Kevin Kane, for example, argued that the advent of the organisation he worked for signalled an evolutionary leap forward for Scottish cinema, away from the "beautifully shot films for art-house cinemas" which had held sway in the late '80s and early '90s, towards what *Shallow Grave* instantiated, a "commercially successful" cinema "cater[ing] to an international market".³¹⁵ Academic critics were not so sure: Colin McArthur, for example, characterised the GFF's funding remit and public pronouncements as symptoms of a "gadarene rush to film as commodity in Scotland"³¹⁶, a disastrous mimicry of Hollywood-style free market orthodoxies.

Significantly, many critics of *Shallow Grave* who considered the film without explicit reference to the context of its domestic funding expressed very similar worries. In 1996,

³¹⁴ See Allan Hunter, 'Glasgow offers first UK film fund', in *Screen International*, n. 892 (29/1/93), pg. 8; Cathy Dunkley, 'Glasgow's witty thriller', in *Moving Pictures International*, n. 145 (22/7/93), pg. 12; The fund was bankrolled by Glasgow District and Strathclyde Regional Councils, Glasgow Development Agency and the European Regional Development Fund.

³¹⁵ Quoted in Karen McVeigh, 'Starring Glasgow, a character actor of many parts', in *The Independent*, *Metro* section, (19/4/95), pg. 20.

³¹⁶ McArthur, 'Cultural Necessity...', op. cit., pg. 113.

the novelist A. L. Kennedy cautioned that Scotland's "sprint towards some kind of status as a movie-making nation" could not be unequivocally welcomed because of the thematic "nihilism"³¹⁷ exhibited by many local movies. In a wider contemporary British context, Claire Monk singles *Shallow Grave* out for double-edged recognition, "the one 1990s British film in which... discomfiting amoral distance was fully achieved... a film bred of cynical times... its appeal rested substantially on its gleeful, self-conscious surface celebration of greed".³¹⁸ The fear was that *Shallow Grave* was perhaps emblematic of the rise of a socially heedless form of contemporary British cinema. That cinema seemed to be less and less concerned with exploring local cultural specificity - through the representation of the UK's social margins - and more and more with individual economic self-interest - accumulating box office profit margins. Even enthusiastic defenders of *Shallow Grave* seemed willing to concede the point that, whatever the film's other defining characteristics, a strong sense and politicised exploration of discourses of national identity was not one of them. Eddie Dick, for example, countered that,

The complaint about *Shallow Grave*'s lack of Scottishness is precisely to miss the point about the film and to impose inappropriate criteria on it... [it] deliberately eschew[s] parochial specifics.³¹⁹

There seems, therefore, to exist something of an inadvertent critical consensus around *Shallow Grave*, namely, that the film—with even more urgency and clarity than *Rob Roy*—presented an awkward 'either/or' conundrum for Scottish film culture and criticism. *Shallow Grave*'s startling production financing and box office successes demonstrated that Scottish penetration of the British metropolitan film industry and international marketplace was materially possible. The problem, however, was not simply that industrial success made a simultaneous, engaged and complex exploration of national

³¹⁷ A. L. Kennedy, 'Edging close to the bone', in *Sight & Sound*, Vol. 6. 12 (Dec 1996), pg. 24.

³¹⁸ Claire Monk, 'From underworld to underclass: Crime and British cinema in the 1990s', in Steve Chibnall & Robert Murphy (eds.), *British Crime Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1999), pg. 181.

³¹⁹ Dick, op. cit., pp. 22-23.

identity and society difficult; rather, achieving the former might only be possible through ruthless renunciation of any interest in the latter.

Yet in this regard, the following textual analysis of *Shallow Grave* proposes that two crucial differences between this film and *Rob Roy* are just as important as the diptych's numerous similarities. Firstly, unlike *Rob Roy*, *Shallow Grave* managed to wed commercial entrepreneurialism to representational innovation, depicting contemporary national culture in a way that was anything but familiar. Secondly, *Shallow Grave*, in contradistinction to *Rob Roy*, ironically foregrounds the extent to which its ideation of 'Scotland' is a direct product of certain industrial and institutional agendas which made that ideation materially possible in the first place.

Shallow Grave is an important film because it instantiated both an industrially sustainable model for future indigenous production *and* a self-reflexive form of Scottish cinema that might allow domestic audiences a sense of the extent to which that cinema actively constructed, rather than passively reflected, the national images viewers were invited to recognise as their 'own'. The accusation that *Shallow Grave* heedlessly, even gleefully, destroys any sense of its own cultural identity and belonging in the pursuit of box office success is a partial-sighted one. After all, this film is centrally concerned to explore - albeit in a commercially attractive fashion - the moral and psychological consequences to its central characters' analogous destruction of identity in the single-minded pursuit of lucre. In the end, David, Alex and Juliet's barbarous mutilation of Hugo's cadaver and theft of his money, psychically lacerates the trio in as terrible a fashion as it physically does their victim. Unlike *Rob Roy*, however, *Shallow Grave* clearly understands and foregrounds the extent to which, depending on how they are used, local borrowings from American cinematic practice past and present could have negative cultural as well as positive industrial consequences. In so doing, it presents a provocative and searching exploration of discourses of identity - national and otherwise - in contemporary Scottish culture, not to mention the material pressures which shaped the local cinematic representation of these during the early '90s.

Like *Rob Roy*, *Shallow Grave* materially emerged in significant part from local institutional innovations which looked to American exemplars for guidance in the ongoing struggle to establish an industrially viable and continuous film production sector in Scotland. One key similarity between the two films, for example, is that *Shallow Grave* was able to secure essential non-Scottish production finance because its producers, like those of *Rob Roy*, benefited from the novel interest Scottish funding institutions exhibited from the early '90s on in script development funding. From around that time the dominant local institutional conception of script's significance changed. Before, script development monies were seen as a piecemeal, inevitably speculative way to eventually get the occasional Scottish film produced through the more substantial 'kindness of strangers' emanating from other film cultures and industries. Latterly, however, script funding increasingly came to be seen as a strategic tool to consistently attract external capital to chronically penurious Scotland, and so build the critical mass for a substantive local film production sector. Danny Boyle foregrounded the importance of commercially effective, streamlined script structure in *Shallow Grave*, opining that, "narrative became the principal ingredient... narrative was our God".³²⁰ Symptomatically, in 1996 Andrea Calderwood, then BBC Scotland's Head of Drama, argued that "a picture of something which can be called an industry begins to emerge"³²¹ in Scotland precisely because local funding institutions now sought above all else to provide local creative talent with "the ability to finance properly the development of their projects to the stage where the strength of their script could... allow them to create a viable production package".³²²

As a representative, yet also catalytic, early example of the general phenomenon discerned by Calderwood, an initial £5000 SFPF script development grant enabled Hodge and Macdonald to present a draft of *Shallow Grave* to FilmFour Head David Aukin in 1992. Moreover, equally significant as Hodge and Macdonald's financial ability to pitch a script to Aukin was the venue at which they did so. The three men met at Movie Makars, an annual Scottish script development event for filmmakers and funders

³²⁰ Quoted in Bennett, op. cit., pg. 35.

³²¹ Calderwood, op. cit., pg. 190.

³²² Ibid, pp. 190; 193-4.

inaugurated in 1990 by the SFPP's Eddie Dick.³²³ Significantly, as Dick explained in 1999, the structure of and rationale for Movie Makars were suggested by a North American example:

I'd visited Norman Jewison's Canadian Institute for Advanced Film Studies and what was clear was that a country next to a very powerful neighbour, needing to look south for investment in the industry, had to carve out for themselves an area for the development of writers and producers.³²⁴

On the evidence of Hodge and MacDonald's draft, Aukin personally guaranteed a near-unprecedented budgetary contribution to *Shallow Grave* (80%/£0.8m).³²⁵ After becoming responsible in 1993 for selling its own advertising revenues, Channel 4's domestic feature funding activities became increasingly commercial in their *raison d'être*, in sharp contrast to the cultural subsidy approach. In an echo of local worries around *Shallow Grave*'s perceived cultural deracination, contemporary observers predicted that the broadcaster's evolving funding remit would entail that, financially, aesthetically and thematically speaking, "the range of [British] films produced by Channel 4 is destined to narrow".³²⁶ Contemporary British film critics and funders therefore saw *Shallow Grave* simultaneously emerging from and heralding a collective shift towards the maintenance of a national film industry and culture (Scottish and/or British) in market-orientated terms largely derived from American industrial practice.

Indeed, the makers of *Shallow Grave*, like those of *Rob Roy*, deliberately utilised an already proven, commercially orthodox script and generic structure for their film. The crucial difference between the two films, however, involves the extent to which the former, unlike the latter, draws attention to the degree of representational 'compression' its market orientation involves, in terms of the erasure, or at best shorthand presentation,

³²³ See Fell, op. cit., pg. 18.

³²⁴ Eddie Dick quoted in John Archer, 'Anything but Shallow', in *The Herald*, (11/12/99), *Mix* Section, pg. 4.

³²⁵ See Finney, *State...*, op. cit., pg. 175.

³²⁶ John Hill, 'British Film Policy', in Moran (ed.), op. cit., pg. 111.

of local cultural specificity and identity. In *Shallow Grave*, narrative protagonists actively share their creators' pecuniary "dedication to narrative, to the drive of the story."³²⁷ Their values and actions illustrate the potential social and representational consequences of their creators' priorities if utilised unquestioningly and offer an opportunity to assess these. They reject, like their creators, an allegiance to or exploration of the possibilities inherent in any wider forms of social or national collectivity. Their actions take the filmmakers' belief that "we're not in a naïve society anymore... You can't keep trying to recreate *Play for Today*. It's patronising. You can't preach to people anymore."³²⁸ to its logical extreme. Both triumvirates (flatmates and filmmakers) propose in their respective ways the fact of the "the erosion of fragile loyalties to friends and acquaintances rather than to family or place"³²⁹ within contemporary Scottish and British societies. As David's opening voiceover puts it, the text explores the consequences ("what then?") of an untrammelled entrepreneurialism that erodes all other forms of social or national engagement. This erosion is crystallised in a diegesis structured from the outset by the fact that - as the dead David realises, prophetically and/or retrospectively - "you can't trust your friends".

As already noted, *Rob Roy* reduces exposition of the complex historical context surrounding its narrative to little more than a series of ritualised duels between male pugilists taken to embody antithetical 'Scottish' and 'English' national identities. *Shallow Grave* depicts contemporary Scottish metropolitan mores in a very similar manner, yet this film's male antagonists comment directly and ironically on that representational strategy. This allows *Shallow Grave*'s audiences the possibility of seeing the image of 'Scottishness' the film proffers as an ideological construct dictated in part by market forces, rather than (as appears the case in *Rob Roy*) a disinterested reflection of an already-existing archetypal Scottish *ethnos*. After the initial flat interviews which memorably open *Shallow Grave*'s narrative, for example, David and Alex take part in that modern-day version of male hand-to-hand combat *par excellence*: a game of squash. Appropriately enough, the two men are at their health club literally cut off from the

³²⁷ Danny Boyle quoted in Tom Charity, 'In at the deep end', in *Time Out*, (4-11/1/95), pg. 66.

³²⁸ Boyle quoted in Bennett, op. cit., pg. 35.

³²⁹ Paul Massey, 'The Hit Squad', in *The Sunday Times*, (20/1/96), Magazine section, pg. 18.

outside world by the glass walls of the squash court. This early scene both anticipates and materialises the pervasive, yet less physically tangible sense in which *Shallow Grave*'s three flatmates co-exist in a self-created social and cultural cocoon throughout the film, alienated from the Edinburgh and Scotland they nominally inhabit by their ostentatious disdain for these spheres.

At the end of their game, Alex taunts the beaten David in terms that simultaneously embody, yet also conspicuously draw attention to, the etiolated, economical nature of *Shallow Grave*'s depictions of character and cultural context: "defeat: sporting, personal, financial, professional, sexual and everything". Here, Alex shows an insensitive, over-competitive determination to make something trivial, private and small stand in for something much bigger (here, the power dynamic of his relationship with David). This echoes both the terms and motivation of *Shallow Grave*'s parsimonious depiction of local specificity (a fleeting shot of Princes Street here, a brief sequence at a charity ceilidh there), not to mention those of *Rob Roy*'s commercially driven use of the duel to gloss Scotland's partial incorporation within the British State during the early eighteenth century. In *Shallow Grave*, however, the fact that certain contemporary external industrial pressures and local aspirations pushed early '90s Scottish producers towards reductive images of 'Scotland' is not systematically concealed. Rather, it is foregrounded and critiqued (even if obliquely), at various points in the narrative, such as the squash game.

Elsewhere in this regard, the discourse and actions of Alex again seem both to embody, yet also to auto-critique, *Shallow Grave*'s preferred approach to the (non-)depiction of the national culture within which its story is set, and from which the film itself partly emanated. For example, despite the fact of his occupation as a journalist for a local tabloid, Alex displays a remarkable lack of curiosity about the workings of the local and national spheres he is supposed to investigate and comment upon. His personal and professional credos are paraphrased by the last image in the long post-opening credits track that snakes up a tenement staircase to introduce his, David's and Juliet's flat, a welcome mat with the phrase "not today, thank you" printed on it. Alex's interest in 'today' is tenuous at best: at work he glibly rejects a promising assignment because he

“can’t find a human angle” on it. When the flatmates initially discover Hugo’s cadaver, he sardonically remarks that, “it’s not every day I find a story in my own flat.” Yet the interlocking budgetary and creative imperatives of the American Independent model employed by *Shallow Grave* dictated that it was in just such culturally abstracted, restricted, but cost-effective narrative locales that local filmmakers might ‘find’ bankable ‘stories’ for their movies.

The actions and discourses of Alex’s two flatmates also work in ways that simultaneously embody, yet seem to critique (or at very least highlight for consideration), the terms of *Shallow Grave*’s non-representation of local cultural specificity. David, the most reluctant of the central trio to engage in the scheme to mutilate and dispose of Hugo’s body is fatally convinced of its attraction, not simply by the drudgery of his professional role with an Edinburgh accountancy firm, but by the specific terms his staid employer uses to describe this: “there’s a whole world to be accounted for”. For David, the lure of atomised hedonism potentially negates the need for such ‘accountancy’ in a dual sense. First, it is a literal, financial means of escape from an unrewarding profession. Second, it holds out a wider-ranging moral eschewal of personal responsibility that extends well beyond the world of work. None of the flatmates wish to ‘account for the world’, refusing to acknowledge or engage in the obligations inherent in close family or romantic ties, let alone wider local or national ones. David repeatedly fails to open letters from his mother; Juliet constantly refuses to take phone calls from a jilted lover in terms that seek to deny her unavoidable presence in specific personal and social matrices: “Tell him I’m not here”. On first meeting Hugo, David explains these values in terms of solipsistic tautology: “I don’t usually meet people unless I know them.” Complaints about *Shallow Grave*’s ‘deracination’ neglect the extent to which the film ironically comments upon this process, not least through the selfish asociality of the central triumvirate.

However, many celebrations of *Shallow Grave*’s placelessness were equally guilty of misreading the film’s self-consciousness in this regard. In the immediate wake of *Shallow Grave*’s unexpected domestic and international box office success, Andrew MacDonald’s one-off, speculative prescription for individual commercial success (‘three people, three

locations but a cheap and commercially attractive style') was rapidly elevated to something like the status of truism within a newly confident, re-emergent Scottish film culture. Leading figures such as Allan Shiach, first Chair of the soon-to-be-created Scottish Screen, adumbrated that a post-*Shallow Grave* Scottish Cinema would learn that film's lessons by sincerely prioritising international legibility and ubiquity over the depiction of complex cultural specificity in the movies it produced,

Always seeking to find... those human qualities and frailties
which can be recognised within any context... to yield
something with the power to move audiences in Toronto, Tokyo
and Turkey.³³⁰

However, such representative contemporary institutional responses took the validity of Alex's clearly self-interested prescription that all 'good' stories are characterised by their adoption of a completely decontextualised 'human angle' at face value. They missed the extent to which *Shallow Grave*'s trumpeting of its aspirational mimicry of American cinema past and present, and the film's apparently deracinated relationship with contemporary Scottish culture and identity, possessed a self-consciously ironic component. Ostensibly distinctive critical complaints that the film was little more than a disturbingly blinkered, cynical pursuit of commercial competitiveness as a self-sufficient end in itself also ignored *Shallow Grave*'s complexity in this regard. *Shallow Grave*, like its 'Scottish Independent' precursor *Soft Top, Hard Shoulder*, demonstrated awareness that industrial and creative exchanges between Scottish and American cinemas did not take place on studiously equal terms. The former film was a seminal intervention with Scottish film culture because it gleefully deconstructed both elements of the received iconographic armature of 'Scottishness' and the assumption that a film produced in Scotland and/or by Scottish personnel must automatically make totalising statements about national identity first and foremost.

³³⁰ Shiach, op. cit., pg. 22.

Instead, *Shallow Grave* deliberately creates a diegesis in which a caricatured, strictly rationed element of local specificity “entertains for the very simple reason we [i.e., a domestic audience] *don’t* recognize it”.³³¹ Granted, the film’s exaggerated disavowal of its local specificity was in significant part an entrepreneurial strategy aimed at rendering it universally legible, and thus saleable, within international markets. However, this same aspect of *Shallow Grave* simultaneously spoke to contemporary domestic anxieties around, and alienation from, traditional markers of Scottishness, not to mention the attendant danger of individuals’ withdrawal from any form of constructive engagement with national culture past or present on these grounds. During the most ostentatiously ‘national’ scene of the film, when the flatmates attend a charity ceilidh, Alex dismissively asks of the tartan-clad compere fronting the traditional Scottish musicians: “where did they dig him up?” While he and his co-conspirators choose to deny and ridicule the enduring historical legacy of established traditions and images through which the nation identifies itself, *Shallow Grave* presents their actions and identities as compromised to an extent which makes it difficult to accuse the film itself of the same sins. With regards to the material industrial pressures (and financial aspirations) at work within early ’90s Scottish film culture, *Shallow Grave* proposed an aesthetically and thematically novel, commercially attractive template for low-budget ‘Scottish Independent’ feature production. The film did so, however, in a way that also understood that existing popular cultural traditions of representing ‘Scotland’ constituted an ideological and film industrial legacy as impossible to definitively bury, and thus consign to the past, as its diegetic equivalent, a corpse apparently divested of its genetic legacy of distinguishing features and hastily interred in deserted woodlands. By extension, *Shallow Grave* suggested an ideologically nuanced and logistically achievable way in which Scottish filmmakers and audiences might constructively engage in the present with the historic relations of industrial and ideological power that had hitherto shaped the representation of ‘Scotland’ in a corpus of films largely produced from outwith the country.

³³¹ Tony McKibbin, ‘Restless Natives: Scottish Cinema at the Crossroads’, in *Cencrastus*, n. 64 (2000), pg. 14. My insert

Conclusion

There are two major reasons why *Rob Roy* and *Shallow Grave*, and before them, *The Big Man* and *Soft Top*, *Hard Shoulder*, are worthy of the extended consideration afforded them in this chapter. Firstly, these films illustrate many of the developing institutional and creative innovations which allowed an unprecedentedly substantial body of locally themed, produced and/or financed features to emerge from Scotland in the latter half of the 1990s. The same films also illustrate many of the ideological consequences, both progressive and regressive, which such material conditions and developments exerted over dominant trends in the representation of Scottish culture and identity within the feature work of this latter period. By 1995, a marked shift of institutional and creative emphasis within Scottish film culture had become clear. The dominant late '80s/early '90s institutional and critical assumption that an industrially marginalised national cinema could only survive, let alone develop, through local adoption of cultural subsidy-orientated European Art cinema models, whether textual or infrastructural, was gradually relinquished. In its place emerged a new generation of local filmmakers and funders who looked to learn from the commercial American film industry past and present, in terms of practices both creative (generic form, script structure) and institutional (systematic development funding, local film offices, attraction of visiting production activity). This reorientation was part of an audacious entrepreneurial bid to create not simply a greater number of individual Scottish features, but also a substantive domestic infrastructural and institutional nexus, which could comfortably exist and compete in the international commercial mainstream.

The second reason for prolonged discussion of *Rob Roy* and *Shallow Grave*, *The Big Man* and *Soft Top*, *Hard Shoulder*, is that study of the manner in which these films were contemporarily received helps to identify some problematic trends within contemporary Scottish film critical discourse and debate. Identifying such trends helps to negotiate them in the wider account of the 1990s offered throughout the present work. Firstly, much academic writing responded to the rapidly changing contours of the Scottish film landscape during the early '90s by reiterating an established but increasingly inflexible

conception of an ideal Scottish cinema conceived in canonical European Art terms. This position tended to critique—on individual occasions, with a degree of justification—the industrial gains of the early '90s as a phenomenon “more to do with the incentives of inward investment than with cultural commitment”.³³² Consequently, the American-influenced and/or -produced images of Scotland resulting from the Scottish production and institutional sectors' cautious expansion, it was typically suspected, “may bring more benefits to tourism than to national self-awareness”.³³³ However, this blanket conclusion tended to pass over the extent to which the ideological complexity and tenor of national representations in the emergent 'Scottish-American' film cycle varied markedly from film to film. *Rob Roy*'s naturalisation of the contemporary material pressures shaping its preferred depiction of 'Scotland' is a very different matter, ideologically speaking, from *Shallow Grave*'s satirical atomisation of the same processes.

By selectively fixating on the perceivedly problematic representational and ideological aspects of early '90s 'Scottish-American' films, academic work of the period failed to engage directly with the very fact, let alone the material scale and speed, of Scottish cinema's infrastructural and textual transformation. Valid contemporary concerns related to issues of national representation were easily caricatured by hostile parties as a naïvely utopian mindset in which the aim of securing long-term continuity of domestic feature production was to be “properly addressed” free from economic and mercantile pressures, “questions [which] will take care of themselves”.³³⁴ On the other hand, however, institutional and creative personnel in early '90s Scotland were often guilty of conflating the issue of Scottish cinema's short-term economic vitality with its long-term cultural equivalent, or even worse, to understand industrial initiatives and developments as ideologically neutral. Given the straightened circumstances endured locally since the mid '80s, the dominant early '90s institutional belief that ultimately “any production helps normalise [the] abnormal activity”³³⁵ of feature-making in Scotland is both understandable and sympathetic. It entailed, however, that questions relating to an

³³² John Caughie, 'Scotland and Film', in Caughie (with Kevin Rockett), *The Companion to British and Irish Cinema* (London: Cassell/BFI, 1996), pg. 145

³³³ Ibid, pg. 146.

³³⁴ Colin McArthur quoted in (and savaged by) Dick, 'Poor Wee...', op. cit., pg. 19.

³³⁵ Eddie Dick quoted in Macnab, op. cit., pg. 24.

emergent domestic cinema's capacity, even responsibility, to intervene into debates around national culture, society and identity were blithely set aside for consideration at an unspecified later date. As Steve McIntyre noted in 1996, a damagingly one-sided local conception of cinema as cultural industry, "wherein industrial arguments are unequivocally dominant"³³⁶, had by this time taken firm root in Scotland.

In retrospect, therefore, 1995-96, Scottish cinema's *annus mirabilis*, was beset by a structuring paradox. On one hand, rapid and unlooked-for industrial, commercial and critical advances had been made since 1990. On the other, both the reasons for this collective success, not to mention the lessons it offered for the future consolidation of an industrially sustainable and culturally progressive Scottish cinema, were largely ignored or misinterpreted from a variety of contemporary perspectives. In one sense, *Rob Roy* and *Shallow Grave* would prove equally characteristic of dominant creative and representational trends in late '90s Scottish cinema. As shall be shown in the next two chapters, the 'Scottish Classical' and 'Scottish Independent' cycles to which these two films gave their respective imprimaturs of commercial legitimacy flourished between 1995 and 2001. In another, more diffuse sense, however, *Rob Roy* proved much more indicative of what was to come than did *Shallow Grave*. As in the former film, the difficult ideological trade-offs and compromises inherent in speculative engagement with American creative and industrial practices were either denied or misunderstood by a significant number of institutional and creative personnel influential in late '90s Scotland. While *Shallow Grave*'s coolly modern aesthetic—aphoristic screenwriting, fluid tracking shots, striking colour palettes and manicured surreality—was much imitated, the film's less immediately apparent cautionary tale about the dangers lurking in a self-interested but unself-reflexive cosmopolitanism was conveniently ignored. Glossed over, too, was the film's implication that a sustainable future for Scottish cinema lay in an enterprising and ongoing renegotiation of the terms structuring the country's traditional industrial and financial marginality through aesthetically radical, or at very least, imaginative forms of low-budget production. Preferred instead was *Rob Roy*'s misleading suggestion of a

³³⁶ Steve McIntyre, 'Art and Industry: Regional Film and Video Policy in the UK', in Moran (ed.), op. cit., pg. 227.

definitive break from that past through an unlikely quantum leap into the international mainstream.

Increasingly harassed as the police close in on the guilty flatmates towards *Shallow Grave*'s neo-Jacobean denouement, Juliet, hidden behind Jackie O-style sunglasses, prepares to exchange Scotland for more attractive foreign climes, attempting to buy a one-way air ticket to Rio de Janeiro. An over-enthusiastic travel agent suggests a plethora of potential connecting routes and fares, thus ensuring that what should be a relatively simple transaction soon descends into chaos. Juliet's desire to quite literally escape from 'home' is a fatally compromised one, and her guilty desperation means she cannot countenance any extended exploration of the divergent routes and economic scales ("£765 direct" to "the wrong side of £912") through which Scotland can be successfully linked with other cultures. Like many participating in a transformed Scottish cinema after the boom year of 1995-96, she is solely (and in the end, self-defeatingly) concerned only with what seems the most direct and uncomplicated routes of international connection, divested of realistic and sensible economic consideration. The consequences appertaining to the dominance of this febrile logic during the late '90s are explored over the next two chapters.

Chapter 3

A National Lottery? Institutional and industrial developments, 1995-2001

Introduction: 'changing attitudes' to the study of Scottish film institutions

The previous chapter documented a marked generic and aesthetic reorientation which gathered pace within Scottish cinema during the first half of the 1990s. At the decade's outset, the idea that this local cinema might be anything other than a precarious cameo of publicly subsidised, aesthetically and/or politically radical Art traditions familiar from post-WWI Europe would have seemed logistically impossible. Yet by 1995, films such as *Rob Roy* and *Shallow Grave* heralded for some the advent of a contemporary Scottish cinema and film production sector radically different from what little had gone before. Eddie Dick, Chief Officer of the Scottish Film Production Fund (SFPP), felt confident enough of the recent but definitive sea-change in Scottish film culture's self-image to publicly announce "the change of attitudes here"³³⁷ which was spurring on new Scottish filmmakers "trying to think of stories that will work on an international level".³³⁸

Yet such 'changed attitudes' were not exclusively creative in nature; they were also institutional. Important mid '90s works like *Shallow Grave*, *Trainspotting* and *Rob Roy* did not just happen to emerge in some kind of 'natural' organic sense. These films and filmmakers were successfully produced because a range of new and established Scottish and British funding institutions (the Glasgow Film Fund, Movie Makars, the Scottish Film Production Fund, Channel 4) were willing to bankroll, and by extension legitimate, the former's US-influenced, mainstream commercial aspirations. This was because in large part such institutions shared them. Dick's above-quoted effusion formed a symptomatic component of the local cinematic phenomenon it ostensibly stood apart from to better observe. Pointing out that mid-to-late 1990s Scotland witnessed the emergence of an unprecedented wave of local features, many 'Scottish-American' in their generic and aesthetic aspects, therefore tells but half the story. Over the same period, the

³³⁷ Quoted in Allan Hunter, 'Plaid Influence', in *Screen International*, n. 1020 (11/8/95), pg. 12.

³³⁸ Ibid.

country developed an infrastructural nexus which both attempted to mimic US institutional precedents and which was eager to develop Scotland as a competitive, continuous service sector for international, and particularly American, visiting productions. Taken as a whole, the existence and effects of this institutional ferment constituted the main reason for the emergence of a 1990s 'Scottish-American' cinema.

This chapter is therefore dedicated to the analysis of central institutional developments within late '90s Scottish film culture. In this regard, it is to a significant degree indebted to the broad 1990s critical consensus which this dissertation opened by noting. That consensus proposed, over and above individual critics' very different preferred ideal aesthetic and/or political type(s) of 'Scottish film', that institutional questions constituted the most urgent and productive line of enquiry in Scottish cinema studies. Understanding the material obstacles and opportunities confronting attempts to establish a sustainable national film production base formed the main priority. Politically inflected questions of textual analysis, in other words, tracing the ways in which Scottish society, history and identity were constructed within specific feature films, while not ignored, assumed secondary importance.

This general position finds its best-known, most influential instantiation in the work of Duncan Petrie. He claims that by 2000, "for the first time ever, there [was] a sufficient body of [indigenous film] work being produced to allow a tentative exploration of the aesthetic and thematic trends [characterising the former]".³³⁹ Yet, this was only so, Petrie proposes, because of "the institutional developments [which] have facilitated an unprecedented level of film-making activity in Scotland".³⁴⁰ Elsewhere, Petrie develops this observation about material causation into a hierarchy of analytic priorities for Scottish cinema scholarship. He argues that "the most important development of the 1990s"³⁴¹ in Scotland did not relate to the emergence of a cluster of commercially profitable indigenous features and creatively accomplished filmmakers. Rather, it was

³³⁹ Duncan Petrie, *Screening Scotland* (London: BFI, 2000), pg. 191. My inserts.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ Duncan Petrie, 'Economics and Aesthetics in the New Scottish Cinema', in *TwoNineTwo: essays in visual culture*, no. 1 (2000), pg. 114.

“the consolidation of a preliminary and rather fragile infrastructure”³⁴² within which *any* reliable continuity of Scottish film production, the occasional critical and/or commercial *succès d’estime* such as *Shallow Grave* included, could take place. For Petrie, “what was required” in 1990s Scotland was “a different kind of institutional intervention geared towards the nurturing of a continuity of Scottish feature film production”.³⁴³ Critical commentary is comparably ‘required’ to take cognisance of that central fact. From this perspective, a late ’90s proliferation of new funding sources and the changing policy imperatives of developing public agencies like the Scottish Film Production Fund (SFPPF) and, from 1997, Scottish Screen, should be assessed and ultimately celebrated in economically and industrially pragmatic terms. Whatever problematic ideological trends might be discerned within late ’90s Scottish cinema, the main point is that the institutions and initiatives in question brought the long sought-after ‘continuity’ of local production activity to pass in an enduring fashion.

As we shall see, Petrie’s analysis of the late ’90s is questionable in certain regards. It either ignores the existence, or downgrades the importance, of certain culturally and/or industrially problematic consequences to the terms in which a range of relevant local and UK-wide institutions - such as Scottish Screen, the Scottish Office, the post-1999 devolved Executive and Channel 4 - attempted to consolidate the unexpected gains of the early ’90s in Scotland. Yet detailed retrospective survey of the period also indicates that Petrie’s central point, the need to acknowledge and understand the belated emergence of a relatively stable Scottish cinema, is fundamentally sound. For instance, back in 1995, not all industry commentators shared Eddie Dick’s optimism about Scotland’s immediate or long term prospects. The trade press writer Allan Hunter drew cautionary attention to the repetitive “feast-or-famine cycle that has previously characterised feature film production in Scotland”.³⁴⁴ Neither the early ’80s international success of Bill Forsyth’s first four features nor the late ’80s/early ’90s international festival awards gained by certain Scottish art-house features had bequeathed a legacy of sustained industrial

³⁴² Ibid.

³⁴³ Duncan Petrie, ‘The New Scottish Cinema’, in Mette Hjort & Scott MacKenzie (eds.), *Cinema and Nation* (London: Routledge, 2000), pg. 159.

³⁴⁴ Hunter, op. cit., pg. 12.

expansion in their wake. If Scottish successes such as *Rob Roy* and *Shallow Grave* had taken place on a hitherto unequalled scale, historical precedent dictated that the depths of communal disappointment subsequently plumbed would also prove without precedent. In other words, the nature - indeed, the very existence - of enduring benefits to be gained from the 'Scottish-American' movement spearheaded by *Shallow Grave* constituted profoundly uncertain questions in mid '90s Scotland.

Certainly, many institutional disappointments and controversies would be experienced between 1995 and 2001. Yet it was the former year's positive, not cautionary, prognoses that were largely borne out by the end of the latter. In its *Annual Review* for 2000/01, Scottish Screen (since 1997, the major integrated public agency for film production and culture in Scotland) noted that the period had proved "a quiet year for feature production".³⁴⁵ Yet the review went on to state that comparative inactivity had still injected some £20m of film production-related spend into the Scottish economy.³⁴⁶ This ballpark figure and what it represented—stimulus to regional and national economies, stability of employment for the local skills and knowledge base and an expansion and diversification of entry points into Scotland's audiovisual industries for new talent—would all have seemed wildly optimistic as recently as 1995. And as the introduction to the present work noted, 1995-2000 proved easily the most fecund period in Scottish cinematic history, in terms of indigenous production levels: 18 features and 45 shorts were made in Scotland over that half-decade alone, and this figure excludes visiting production activity.³⁴⁷

By 2000, then, it was clear to most that indigenous film production had for the first time established itself - even if on a comparatively modest scale - as a truly continuous, rather than frustratingly periodic, cultural and industrial activity in Scotland. That year, John Archer, the first Chief Executive of Scottish Screen, proposed that "during 1999 it became possible to talk about a Scottish Film Industry without having to use quotation

³⁴⁵ Scottish Screen, *Scottish Screen Annual Review 2000-01* (Glasgow: Scottish Screen, 2002), pg. 6.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid*, pg. 15.

³⁴⁷ See reference 16, *passim*.

marks around the ‘industry’ bit”.³⁴⁸ This achievement was predicated, as Petrie and others have posited, upon the fact of the Scottish film institutional sector’s expansion, variegation and enhanced capitalisation, to a degree that would have been unexpected even as recently as 1995.

The rest of this chapter charts and assesses that process in some detail. Firstly, it sketches some general conceptual issues raised in discussion of institutions within academic Film Studies generally. It also establishes the extent to which such diffuse concerns were manifested in locally specific Scottish institutional analyses. Secondly, this chapter juxtaposes the institutional case histories of two late ’90s films, *The Near Room* and *Orphans*. This illustrates the extent to which it is difficult to establish consistently, unambiguously causal links in ideologically-focused assessments of a given film’s representation of national identity and the political and industrial agendas of the institutions through which it was produced. This proviso then in turn informs a number of specific case studies, examining the most significant local and UK institutions active within late ’90s Scottish cinema: Scottish Screen, the Scottish Office and, latterly, the Scottish Executive, the National Lottery Funding Panel and Channel 4. Within and across these case studies, a common trajectory emerges: initially brash, self-confident free mercantile agendas for Scottish cinema’s industrial development become increasingly chastened and questioned as the 1990s near their end. By the start of the ’00s, a collective entrepreneurial and internationally-focused institutional agenda which must—as Petrie reminds us—be given significant credit for securing the material basis for a sustainable Scottish cinema, nevertheless appeared exhausted. This was so even in the near-exclusively economic terms of reference that agenda had consistently set itself.

Linking ‘commerce’ and ‘culture’: Scotland, Film Studies and institutional analysis

While the material centrality and broad success of institutional developments within late ’90s Scottish cinema looks in retrospect undeniable, this does not in itself make apparent the most appropriate methodological approaches through which those developments can

³⁴⁸ Quoted in Petrie, *Screening ...*, pp. 222-223.

be usefully understood. This fact becomes clear through comparative discussion of the institutional background to two local films, one relatively unknown - *The Near Room* - and the other, one of the most critically acclaimed of all recent Scottish films - *Orphans*. Examining catalytic pre-'95 works like *Shallow Grave* and *Rob Roy* in the previous chapter, I proposed a relationship between institutions and creative personnel during that period characterised by a marked degree of congruence and symbiosis. However, given the greater number of local features and patrons that emerged post '95, relationships between these two constituencies became much more fragmented, multifaceted and even confrontational, as consideration of *The Near Room* and *Orphans* shall show.

The validity (or otherwise) of assuming direct causal relationships between a given film text and its industrial and institutional background is a not simply a question which resonates throughout academic Film Studies as a whole. This is because, as Douglas Gomery notes,

In most of the world cinema is first of all organized as an industry, that is, as a collection of businesses seeking profits through film production, film distribution, and the presentation of movies to audiences.³⁴⁹

Underlying a range of ostensibly distinctive approaches to film institutional issues within the discipline is a shared belief that relationships between texts and the industrial nexuses from which they emerge can be largely explained in deterministic terms. Sometimes this position is justified as intellectually pragmatic. Gomery, for example, proposes as a general rule that,

While the film industry does not straightforwardly determine the aesthetic and ideological characteristics of film, it none

³⁴⁹ Douglas Gomery, 'Hollywood as industry', in John Hill & Pamela Church Gibson (eds.), *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), pg. 245.

the less sets the constraints within which aesthetics, ideology, and reception must operate.³⁵⁰

Others accede to the deterministic position in a markedly more polemic way. Anne Jäckel, for instance, argues that feature film production is a unique mode of industrial manufacture in that,

Its products are cultural, public as well as private goods, with a symbolic (historical, national, linguistic, social) significance that cannot be reduced to a mere commodity.³⁵¹

This, for Jäckel, explains why it is that,

Most countries in Europe continue to implement some form of protection for their national film industry... films are considered far too socially important to be left to market forces.³⁵²

Despite their clearly distinctive rhetorical aspects, both these general positions on institutional questions tend towards an assumption that the ideological discourses structuring a given film text reflect those characterising the institutions within and through which that text was financed and produced. Thus, mainstream Hollywood cinema tends to replicate the values of free market capitalism because it is produced with an industry organised along these economic lines (Gomery); the existence of a contemporary European cinema that defines itself as aesthetically and/or ideologically opposed to the *lingua franca* of Hollywood is explained through the presence of funding institutions which self-consciously differentiate themselves from the free market ethos of the commercial film industry (Jäckel). But within both the pragmatic and polemic variants upon this reflectionist model of institutional studies, the ideological characters of

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

³⁵¹ Anne Jäckel, *European Film Industries* (London: BFI, 2003), pg. 1.

³⁵² Ibid.

both films and the institutions that produce them are believed essentially homologous because causally defined: ideologically problematic films typically result from ideologically problematic funding and production structures, and something similar is also true of more progressive films.

Well-known local variants upon these general 'polemic' and 'pragmatic' variants upon the reflectionist model can be found within 1990s Scottish cinema criticism. The work of Colin McArthur instantiates a pessimistic variant of the polemic position applied on the ground in '90s Scotland. For McArthur, the key conclusion to draw from local institutional developments during that decade was that "the possibility of a nationally specific Scottish cinema... is becoming increasingly remote".³⁵³ This was because Scottish institutions typically and fruitlessly tried to accommodate and/or replicate the capitalist mainstream of international film production. This "surrender to an industrial model"³⁵⁴ of what an emergent Scottish cinema might look like, precluded the rise of a publicly funded production sector, the aims of which were structured by a clearly distinctive cultural rationale. By contrast, Duncan Petrie advances an optimistic version of the pragmatic alternative. He argues that the material success of the institutional initiatives and ethos which fostered previously unseen levels of indigenous feature production in the '90s was paralleled by the political progressiveness of the films in question. For Petrie, these generally "demonstrate the expression of cultural specificity in terms that are both resolutely national and international in their relevance and appeal".³⁵⁵

The respective assessments of '90s Scotland reached in McArthur and Petrie's institutional analyses are clearly very different. However, each is similarly hampered by the unwarranted assumption each makes of the linear relationship that allegedly holds between the ideological character of films and the institutions that produce them. On one hand, McArthur could not fully acknowledge the vital, materially facilitating effects of institutional developments in '90s Scotland. This in part was because his ideological dislike of many of the films produced through such infrastructural innovations led him to

³⁵³ Colin McArthur, "In praise of a Poor Cinema", in *Sight & Sound*, Vol. 3. 8 (August 1993), pg. 32.

³⁵⁴ Ibid, pg. 30.

³⁵⁵ Petrie, *Screening...*, op. cit., pg. 226.

project directly the faults he perceived in the former on to the latter. On the other, prior to his 2004 monograph *Contemporary Scottish Fictions*, Petrie presented a rather sanitised, self-congratulatory gloss upon what he proposed were the dominant aesthetic and representational trends within Scottish cinema of the period. This in part was due to his belief that the creation of the material conditions within which a truly sustainable Scottish cinema might emerge counted as a progressive intervention in and of itself. Petrie's positive view of 1990s Scottish institutions led him to project a comparable form of blanket optimism onto the corpus of films the former helped produce.

Rather than aligning the present study closer to one of these two important critics' arguments than the other, the most productive analytical approach to 1990s Scottish film culture's institutional component is one which avoids their shared assumption of a straightforwardly linear, causal relationship between institutional and textual politics. For example, a film such as *The Near Room* at first seems critically insignificant due to its glaring commercial and critical failure. Yet the same text's institutional background is significant in the extreme, illustrating as it does one highly successful local initiative which both raised feature production activity levels in the city of Glasgow, and consolidated the city's pool of skilled labour. Conversely, a film such as *Orphans*, lauded as one of the most artistically accomplished, culturally significant films to emerge from '90s Scotland, emerged from—despite, even—an institutional background which illustrates some of the obstacles which increasingly faced local filmmakers as the decade came to a conclusion.

Shallow Grave's January 1995 theatrical pre-release in selected London cinemas was but days old when the Glasgow Film Fund publicly announced the finalisation of funding for the next feature project to benefit from its largesse, *The Near Room*. The GFF would eventually part-fund this film to the tune of £0.25m.³⁵⁶ The mere prospect of a second GFF-funded local feature was prompt enough for Alan Shiach, Chair of the SFPPF, to echo Eddie Dick's near-contemporaneous proclamation of changed attitudes and

³⁵⁶ See Allan Laing, 'Shallow Grave has backers digging deep for new film', in *The Herald*, (12/1/95), pg. 9.

expanding horizons. A new, continuously rolling, international, theatrical and commercially independent Scottish cinema was allegedly superseding its traditional, irregular, domestic, televisual and subsidy-reliant predecessor with remarkable ease:

The success of *Shallow Grave* and *The Near Room* proves that here in Scotland we are no longer making films just for our television consumption but films of real international standing.³⁵⁷

Sadly, *The Near Room* met a commercial and critical fate as grisly as *Shallow Grave*'s had been glittering. Budgeted at around £0.8m (some £0.15m less than *Shallow Grave*), *The Near Room* grossed a mere £29 135 at the British box office (as opposed to *Shallow Grave*'s £5m+).³⁵⁸ Once it was finally picked up for theatrical distribution in 1997, *The Near Room* limped into some twenty Scottish cinemas for seven days before disappearing altogether from British screens.³⁵⁹

The Near Room amalgamates elements of the emergent 'Scottish Classical' and 'Scottish Independent' cycles instantiated by *Rob Roy* and *Shallow Grave* respectively. As in the case of *Rob Roy*, the makers of *The Near Room* took Studio-era genres as their creative lodestar, although in this case, *film noir* rather than the Western. Screenwriter Robert Murphy acknowledged that his script for *The Near Room* deliberately aimed to follow in the footsteps of canonical *noirs* such as *Chinatown* (Roman Polanski, USA, 1974), "films that take you into dark areas... the Chanderlesque"³⁶⁰ in his story of a tabloid journalist investigating paedophile rings and official cover-ups in an unnamed Scottish metropolis. Accordingly, supportive local press coverage trumpeted *The Near Room* as, "a fast moving, paranoid thriller in the style of *Angel Heart* (Alan Parker, USA, 1987) and

³⁵⁷ Quoted in Harry Conroy, 'A successful industry, if we all pull together', in *The Herald*, (23/3/95), pg. 7.

³⁵⁸ See Eddie Dyja (ed.), *BFI Film & Television Handbook 1999* (London: BFI, 1998), pg. 32.

³⁵⁹ William Russell, 'Too gauche for comfort', in *The Herald*, (10/4/97), pg. 19.

³⁶⁰ Murphy quoted in Matthew Magee, 'Film Noir with a Glaswegian accent', in *Scotland on Sunday*, (30/7/95), *Spectrum* section, pg. 12.

Chinatown".³⁶¹ Echoing *Shallow Grave*, *The Near Room*'s director, David Hayman, echoed the former film's celebrated assertion that Edinburgh 'could be any city' when he set out his aim to direct "an international film that happened to take place in Glasgow... I wanted to make Glasgow look like New York".³⁶² Such continuities made *The Near Room*'s critical and box office failure particularly disquieting, because it cast doubt upon the hope that an emergent 'Scottish-American' creative and institutional template might prove *the* central vehicle for the creation of a sustainable local production base, the idea contemporaneously advanced by important institutional figures like Eddie Dick and Allan Shiach. As a more sceptical commentator noted in 1995, "one hit movie does not transform Glasgow into Southern California".³⁶³

Yet if *The Near Room* represented a discouraging instance of local cinematic 'failure' in critical and commercial senses, it simultaneously instantiated an important success in less immediately comprehensible infrastructural ways. This film, and the wider cycle of early GFF-funded projects it formed part of, provided a positive economic stimulus to Glasgow, Scotland's major regional filmmaking centre. In the case of *The Near Room*, the GFF had increased an original £0.15m funding award to the film by a further £0.1m, after the project's main private investor, Australian distributor Smart Egg, withdrew their funding commitment one day into the film's location shoot in summer 1995. The GFF's internal funding guidelines allowed the organisation to break its £0.15m funding ceiling if a supported project was deemed of especial economic benefit to Glasgow. Indeed, original GFF funding criteria specified that where funding applications to the organisation did not involve a Glasgow-based production company, producers were required to give a commitment that, should their request be successful, subsequent production spend within the city would prove to be at least 200% the level of an original GFF award. Although *The Near Room* was technically exempt from this criterion, produced as it was by a Glasgow-based company, Inverclyde, its £0.7m spend within the

³⁶¹ Anon, 'Glasgow doubles its film fund cash', in *Scottish Film & Visual Arts*, n. 6 (4th Quarter 1993), pg. 23.

³⁶² Quoted in Graeme Stewart, 'Shelved Scottish film ready to roll as distributor found', in *The Scotsman*, (8/5/97), pg. 6.

³⁶³ Robert McCall, 'The "Near Room" looks for a win double', in *Scottish Film*, n. 12 (1995), pg. 9.

local economy accounted for 78% of the film's entire production budget, and was 280% of the GFF's eventual funding contribution.³⁶⁴

In this case, GFF subsidy of a given feature precipitated a capital injection into Glasgow's audiovisual and related service industries far in excess of the public monies the organisation dispensed. Crucially, this was to become a pattern repeated across the GFF's early investments. *Shallow Grave* spent £0.5m in Glasgow (56% of its production budget and 333% of its £0.15 grant from GFF); *Small Faces* spent £0.74m in the city (54% of its entire production budget and 493% of the GFF's investment in the project).³⁶⁵ In the case of *The Near Room*, the enhanced GFF support that enabled the film to go into production resulted in employment and professional experience for around 70 local creative and technical personnel (cast excluded). This figure included some of the first graduates from an eighteen month-old training initiative, Scottish Broadcast and Film Training. SBFT was co-operatively funded by the country's major public and commercial terrestrial broadcasters, relevant trade unions and the independent producers' organisation (PACT) in an attempt to combat the spectre of skills shortages within a developing Scottish production sector.³⁶⁶

Such significant financial benefits, even from a commercially unsuccessful funding beneficiary, were important steps towards what was envisaged as the GFF's eventual aim as presented by Eddie Dick, namely that the organisation's "small amount of money is extended, re-invested and becomes a rolling fund".³⁶⁷ Between 1995 and 2000 GFF ultimately invested c. £1.92m in 12 domestic and international production shoots which located in the Glasgow area. Grants like these helped stimulate (on the organisation's own estimate) a production spend in the city of £11.5 m in 1999 alone.³⁶⁸ As with a range of similar contemporary regional production initiative schemes based in former major industrial urban centres, the GFF prioritised the need for urban communities' economic

³⁶⁴ Figures quoted from Anon, 'Small Faces release as GFF list reaches five', in *Screen Finance*, (20/3/96), n. pg. ref. (Scottish Screen Information Services).

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

³⁶⁶ See John Ivison, 'Film sorcerer mourns the death of his apprentice', in *The Scotsman*, (30/3/95), pg. 25.

³⁶⁷ Eddie Dick quoted in Geoffrey Macnab, 'Highland Reels', in *Moving Pictures International*, n. 8 (Apr 1995), pg. 25.

³⁶⁸ Figures derived from Petrie, *Screening...*, op. cit., pp. 227; 176.

regeneration and modernisation over that for their detailed representation and re-interpretation by preferably locally based practitioners, with a marked degree of practical success.³⁶⁹ Certainly, hard questions need to be raised about the lack of an explicit, coherently explicated cultural dimension to the GFF's original funding guidelines and institutional ethos. Colin McArthur, for example, worried at the time of the organisation's inception that these had "given the final impetus to Scotland's headlong rush towards an industrial conception of filmmaking".³⁷⁰ Yet the GFF undoubtedly went on to make a vital contribution towards the creation of a sustainable and diversified production sector in Glasgow. Despite the problematic institutional terms upon which it was predicated, without this kind of material consolidation there would have been far less 1990s Scottish feature production activity around which to stage *any* form of culturally orientated debate by the decade's end.

The case of *The Near Room* is one where a given film's commercial and critical marginality and failure potentially obscures the wider material and progressive impact of the institution(s) which funded it. The example of writer/director Peter Mullan's debut feature *Orphans* also shows (but in a different way) how relationships between late '90s Scottish films and filmmakers and the rapidly evolving local and/or British metropolitan institutional nexus that bankrolled the former were not linear in any straightforward sense.

Inspired in part by Mullan's own experience of maternal bereavement, *Orphans* is a surreal tragi-comedy following four Glasgow siblings' attempts to come to terms with their mother's death on the eve of her funeral. Criticism has identified the film as creatively important due to its audacious blurring of surreal and social realist aesthetics, comic and tragic registers. Moreover, *Orphans* has also been presented as a significant work in national cultural terms. Writer/director Mullan argued in interview that his film was intended as an allegory for the traumatic and confusing choices facing Scottish

³⁶⁹ See Julia Hallam, 'Film, class and national identity: re-imagining communities in the age of devolution', in Justine Ashby & Andrew Higson (eds.), *British Cinema, Past and Present* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 261-273.

³⁷⁰ McArthur, 'In praise...', op. cit., pg. 31.

society after the late twentieth century collapse of the British political consensus that had underpinned the legitimacy of the post-WWII Welfare State, what he called,

A general feeling that since Mother Welfare State was no longer there, what happens to the Scottish working class; where do we go, who do we turn to?... So [*Orphans*] started off as part-personal, part-allegory.³⁷¹

In a closely related sense, critics have noted and praised the film's re-working of the most recurrent representational and narrative motifs in indigenous Scottish cinema, namely, the child as central protagonist and/or autobiographical narratives concerned with childhood experience and memory. Scottish cinema's childhood tradition has often been seen to tend towards a politically self-defeating form of nostalgia. John Caughie complained in 1990, for example, of the "debilitating" fact that "loss still pervades Scottish feature films, still appearing as the characteristic mark of really serious Scottishness".³⁷² Against this backdrop, certain observers have argued that the importance of *Orphans* lies in its re-conception of childhood's symbolic resonance within Scottish film culture. The present author, for example, contends that, in relation to this film's self-publicised concern with national allegory and social commentary, it is no accident that Mullan's work conceives the pre-adult neither as a state of powerlessness nor as a lost idyll. Rather, in *Orphans* childhood as national-allegorical motif is made over into a challenging but hopeful, future-orientated state of becoming and self-transformation, "characterised to a degree by possibility and fluidity, not by... inevitable closure and trauma".³⁷³ And yet despite all this, when approached from an institution-centred perspective, *Orphans* presents a negative image of the paradox structuring *The Near Room*. While the former film represented a progressive, artistically accomplished intervention within national cultural debates, this encouraging fact should not obscure a simultaneous awareness that *Orphans* emerged despite, as much as because of, its institutional provenance.

³⁷¹ Quoted in Derek O'Connor, 'Interview with Peter Mullan', in *Film West*, n. 36 (May 1999), pg. 12.

³⁷² John Caughie, 'Representing Scotland: new questions for Scottish Cinema', in Eddie Dick (ed.), *From Limelight to Satellite: A Scottish Film Book* (London/Glasgow: BFI/SFC, 1990), pg. 25.

³⁷³ Jonathan Murray, 'Contemporary Scottish Film', in *The Irish Review*, n. 28 (Winter 2001), pg. 84.

In a microcosmic illustration of the general argument advanced here regarding the centrality of institutions, *Orphans* owed the fact of its successful production to several key innovations and developments witnessed in Scotland during the '90s. Firstly, this was so at the level of production funding: the £1.7m production budget for *Orphans* was assembled thanks to key financial contributions from both the GFF and Channel 4, enthusiastically re-engaged in Scottish feature funding in the wake of its heady paydays from *Shallow Grave* and *Trainspotting*. Equally important was Peter Mullan's prior assembly of a distinguished portfolio of short film work - *Close* (GB, 1994), *Good Day for the Bad Guys* and *Fridge* (both GB, 1995). These films acted as a professional calling card to potential funders approached to facilitate the director's move 'up' into feature work.³⁷⁴ They were produced through a range of short film production schemes set up in Scotland during the '90s by the SFPF and the two major local terrestrial broadcasters, BBC Scotland and Scottish Television, with precisely this end in mind. In 1996, Andrea Calderwood argued that the new Scottish short schemes aimed to create "a comprehensive ladder of development... a way into the mainstream industry for emerging Scottish talent".³⁷⁵ *Close* and *Good Day* were financed through First Reels, set up in 1991 by the SFPF and STV. *Fridge* was a product of Tartan Shorts, established by the SFPF and BBC Scotland in 1992, and the scheme through which *Franz Kafka's It's a Wonderful Life* was produced. Other Scottish filmmakers to benefit from the 'ladder' ethos of Scottish short schemes during the '90s included Lynne Ramsay, Jim Gillespie and David Mackenzie.³⁷⁶ In one sense, then, the production background to *Orphans* constitutes a symptomatic mark of the fundamentally enabling material success enjoyed by local institutional initiatives throughout the '90s in Scotland. Both Mullan and his feature clearly benefited from local support mechanisms of a kind which had simply not existed prior to the early '90s.

³⁷⁴ See Duncan Petrie, 'A short film about a freezer', in *Sight & Sound*, Vol. 9. 4 (Apr 1999), pg. 14.

³⁷⁵ Andrea Calderwood, 'Film and television policy in Scotland', in John Hill & Martin McLoone (eds.), *Big Picture, Small Screen: The relations between film and television* (Luton: John Libbey Media/University of Luton, 1996), pp. 192-93.

³⁷⁶ See Brian Pendreigh, 'Short and sweet for Scots', in *The Herald*, (13/4/00), pg. 16.

Yet *Orphans*' production history is also symptomatic of far less progressive or straightforward aspects to the process of institutional evolution and expansion upon which the emergence of a substantive indigenous feature cinema from 1990s Scotland was predicated. For example, after providing around £0.55 m of the production budget for *Orphans*, Channel 4 refused to finance the completed film's subsequent UK theatrical distributions, leaving it to languish in limbo. Mullan argued at the time that this was a decision based upon mercantile calculation, as opposed to altruistic patronage of creatively innovative work of national cultural significance: "the word has always been thus far, 'loved your movie but we don't think it's gonna sell'".³⁷⁷ Only after winning three major prizes (including Best Film) at the 1998 Venice Film Festival was *Orphans* picked up for UK distribution in early 1999 by the British independent distributor Downtown. Mullan's working relations with Channel 4's film production and distribution arm FilmFour subsequently became so bad that he publicly complained that the broadcaster had destroyed forty-five minutes of unused footage from *Orphans* without notifying him.³⁷⁸

Moreover, in contemporary interviews, Mullan presented his travails as more than just a private grief. Rather, he argued that they were indicative of a range of daunting but unavoidable institutional questions facing all filmmakers working from Scotland during the late '90s. On one hand, the mid-decade success of *Shallow Grave* and *Trainspotting* had proved catalytic in a productive sense, in that it had markedly stimulated metropolitan funders' interest in new work emerging from Scotland. Channel 4's financial support for Scottish feature production, for example, became more consistent from 1995 onwards than it had been since the very first year of the broadcaster's working life, 1982-83. On the other, this ostensibly positive economic development trailed certain regressive cultural consequences in tow. Specifically, Mullan proposed that externally-based patrons like Channel 4 were not so much interested in funding a 'new Scottish cinema' during the late '90s as they were in profiting from what was temporarily believed to be a new, internationally marketable post-*Trainspotting* stereotype of 'Scotland' as a

³⁷⁷ Quoted in O'Connor, op. cit., pg. 13.

³⁷⁸ See Anthony Kaufman, 'Scotland's Indie film 'Orphan' Peter Mullan', @ <http://www.indiewire.com/film/interviews/intMullanPeter000308.html> <accessed 28/2/02>

post-industrial, sub-cultural narcotic playground. Of his own experience, he argued that Channel 4 could not “see past the fact that [*Orphans*] was a Scottish film, thus it should be another *Trainspotting*”.³⁷⁹ From this, Mullan concluded that, despite benefiting from more extensive institutional support and realistically available levels and sources of production finance than ever before, “the pressure now on Scottish filmmakers especially, is how do they break away from a new stereotype?”³⁸⁰ Thus, while *Orphans* was a film defined by its interlocking formal and political audacity, the irony was that it indicated less the tentative late '90s emergence of an indigenous cinema regularly defined by such qualities, and more certain major institutional obstacles precluding such a cinema's advent at this point in time.

Orphans also demonstrates the essentially complex and contested qualities of the relationship between industrial and national cultural agendas within late '90s Scotland in other ways. As already noted, the film has met with a supportive reaction from academic criticism because its political and formal radicalism are the kind of qualities which that tradition of thought tends to welcome above all else in its preferred idea of 'Scottish Cinema'. Yet it is salutary to consider that within other traditions which give greater priority to economic considerations, *Orphans* can seem a problematic film. This is so despite its artistic and national cultural achievements.

For example, 2003 saw the publication of a major review of the progress of the Scottish audiovisual industries between 1997 and 2001, the *Audit of the Screen Industries in Scotland*. The *Audit* had been commissioned by a broad coalition of governmental, economic development and filmmaker advocacy bodies: the Scottish Executive, PACT, Scottish Enterprise, Scottish Screen and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. The document notes *Orphans* as a representative example of what it sees as the strains and questionable axioms active within late '90s Scottish feature funding policy. The terms in which it does so are worth quoting at some length, if only to re-emphasise that academic criticism must take respectful cognisance of the fact that the criteria by which it might typically assess

³⁷⁹ Quoted in James Mottram, 'Making a scene: interview with Peter Mullan', in *The Guardian*, (27/1/01), *Guide* section, pg. 15.

³⁸⁰ Quoted in O'Connor, op. cit., pg. 13

Scottish film culture's institutional performance are neither self-evidently 'right' nor universally acceded to:

The issue of when and how much to invest in feature films is, for a public body like Scottish Screen, a decision with many strands... the most frequently cited reason [by the organisation] for support of Scottish productions... was the presence of Scottish writers and directors... A number of supported films have won awards at film festivals, many of which exist to showcase 'art house' films from outside the Hollywood commercial system and from non-Anglophone cultures. These events are influential in identifying and projecting new talent, launching reputations outside mainstream cinema, and can drive box office performance. But such reputations do not necessarily bring profits. Peter Mullan's first feature, *Orphans*, was a critical success, but has only recouped 2% of the investment of £900 000 from the Scottish Arts Council... the value of international prizes and festival success may be de-emphasised, if it is not helping to build substantial companies or create marketable products.³⁸¹

Together, therefore, the respective cases of *The Near Room* and *Orphans* indicate the complex considerations involved in making critical judgements regarding both the impact and success of a range of relevant institutions active in late '90s Scotland. What *is* clear, however, is that a given institution's association with films deemed commercially successful and/or progressive in national cultural terms is not grounds enough for a positive critical assessment of it. And conversely, a given institution's support for features which were box office failures, or are seen to be ideologically problematic, does not automatically damn it as materially insignificant or culturally regressive in unilateral

³⁸¹ David Graham & Associates, *Audit of the Screen Industries in Scotland* (Glasgow: PACT in Scotland, 2003), pg. 128.

terms. With these important provisos in mind, we now move to consideration of certain key institutions influential in Scotland during the final years of the '90s.

Scottish Cinema according to Michael, not Bill: the birth of Scottish Screen

By far the most wide-ranging and significant institutional development in late '90s Scotland was the already-noted rationalisation in 1997 of the country's existing public film agencies into a single umbrella organisation, Scottish Screen. Symptomatically, the best-known explanation for the creation of Scottish Screen relates to a pressing local desire to accommodate the industrial needs and follow the industrial example of the mainstream American film industry. In 2002, Scottish Screen's Celia Stevenson retrospectively explained the organisation's genesis as "a direct result of the *Braveheart* factor".³⁸² To clarify: during the *annus mirabilis* of 1995/96, the emergence of commercially successful low-budget indigenous features such as *Shallow Grave* and *Trainspotting* was not the only novel development raising hopes within Scottish film culture. The high profile, lucrative international location shoots brought to Scotland by the Hollywood-financed Scottish historical epics *Rob Roy* and *Braveheart* were also a strong incentive to reform and expand the country's institutional support structures for film production. According to Stevenson, the pressing need to rationalise the publicly-funded infrastructure of Scotland's audiovisual industries, if the country hoped to continue attracting the investment associated with mobile productions, was the central lesson drawn by some from the events of 1995-96. She notes, for example, that this was just the advice given by *Braveheart*'s director, Mel Gibson, to the British Conservative government's then-Secretary of State for Scotland, Michael Forsyth, at an Edinburgh Castle reception hosted by the latter for the producers of that film: "[Gibson] said, 'a one-stop shop', and the idea of Scottish Screen was born".³⁸³ Some contemporary

³⁸² Interview for the author's *Scotch Reels: Scotland in Cinema Pt. 5: Future? What Future?*, tx. BBC Radio Scotland, 30/7/02.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*

commentators welcomed this as “one indication of how a new arts policy [for Scotland generally] might work”.³⁸⁴ David Stenhouse, for example, applauded the fact that,

Instead of attempting to set up a national Scottish film school, [Scottish Screen] aims to focus on offering facilities to visiting filmmakers, marketing the attractions of Scotland for international and domestic filmmakers... a response to the nature of the film industry—highly capitalised, mobile, opportunistic, and *not here*.³⁸⁵

Yet for a majority of local filmmakers, the nascent institutional logic discerned by Stenhouse was anything but a welcome development. Many suspected from Scottish Screen’s inception that both the structure and remit of the organisation were geared more towards attracting international inward investment than consolidating opportunities for domestic filmmakers, a point returned to below.

What is certainly undeniable is that the creation of Scottish Screen as part of a wider mercantilist, service-orientated rationalisation of the Scottish audiovisual industries formed the central aspects of a 1996 Scottish Office-sponsored feasibility study into the *economic* potential of the Scottish screen industries. The report, *Scotland on Screen*, was commissioned by Forsyth in the aftermath of his meeting with Gibson. *Scotland on Screen* noted that not only the recommendations it ultimately made, but also the original terms of the investigatory brief it was handed down from government, “film and television as commercial opportunities”, represented “a shift of emphasis from the traditional ‘cultural’ approach”³⁸⁶ that had previously underwritten very limited state funding of Scottish film production and culture. The ‘emphatic shift’ the report’s authors highlighted was also discernible when Forsyth addressed an audience of American tourism executives in New York, prior to an advance screening of another Hollywood

³⁸⁴ David Stenhouse, ‘Arts Policy and a Scottish Parliament’, in *Scottish Affairs*, n. 17 (Autumn 1996), pg. 9. My insert.

³⁸⁵ Ibid.

³⁸⁶ Hydra Associates, *Scotland on Screen: The Development of the Film and Television Industry in Scotland* (Glasgow: Scott Stern Associates, 1996), pg. 9.

production which located to Scotland during the halcyon days of '95 – '96, *Loch Ness*. Forsyth outlined unambiguously the new logic that he wanted to govern the reformation and expansion of Scotland's institutional nexus:

I will be looking to the new agency [i.e., Scottish Screen] to free up some of its existing resources to reflect the more commercial rather than cultural emphasis which is now important.³⁸⁷

However, this political thinking subsequently proved enduringly problematic for the new organisation which resulted from it.

The problems were twofold. Firstly, from its inception Scottish Screen often appeared obliged to defend the assertion that the strategic privileging of 'commerce' over 'culture' constituted a definitive, rather than provisional, shift in Scottish cinema's industrial evolution. The Forsythian belief that 'culture' and 'commerce' represented largely incompatible, or at very best, clearly distinctive objectives, quite simply misunderstood and/or misrepresented the lessons offered by previous successes such as *Shallow Grave*. Despite the fact that Scottish Screen would enjoy an exponentially greater level of capital to dispense than any of its predecessors, such funds were often not deployed to best effect, or were not fairly assessed during the late '90s. This was because the organisation's scope for conceiving – and equally importantly, presenting – the initiatives it developed and supported as simultaneously industrial and cultural in import was severely limited from the very outset. To some, it came to seem 'not industrial enough'; to others, 'un-cultural'.

The pressures involved in accommodating (or at least, being seen to accommodate) the Free Market *realpolitik* to which Scottish Screen owed its very existence, at the expense of more nuanced discourses, can perhaps be seen in the changing public pronouncements of one of the institution's key officers, Steve McIntyre. In the early '90s, he was the

³⁸⁷ Quoted in Colin McArthur, 'Artists and Philistines: The Irish and Scottish Film Milieux', in *Journal for the Study of British Cultures*, Vol. 5. 2 (1998), pg. 146.

Director of the Scottish Screen Industry Project, a Scottish Film Council-sponsored consultative exercise on the economic prospects of the country's screen industries in the days before the heady successes of 1995/96. At that point in time, McIntyre bemoaned "a naive 'productivism'" which he saw as Scottish film culture's central institutional weakness:

Production, any production has become the guiding principle of policy... Without... a cultural programme, precious arts funding could end up doing little more than propping up (inadequately) commercial filmmaking.³⁸⁸

Yet by 2000, McIntyre, now Scottish Screen's Head of Production, articulated an institutional strategy clearly marked by the mercantilist political agenda which had given birth to the organisation he now worked within. Ironically enough, this position appeared to overlap with the kind of 'productivist' local institutional thinking that McIntyre had been so sceptical about during the early '90s:

I don't think it is up to us [i.e., Scottish Screen] to take any kind of substantial editorial line... Our view has to be culturally neutral, technologically neutral, genre-neutral. If it turns out that a group of filmmakers emerge in that kind of environment and work in a particular way then that's fine. But it's not up to us to dictate that.³⁸⁹

The point here, of course, is that the idea of a truly 'neutral', industry-centred institutional 'editorial line' is a chimera. What Duncan Petrie analogously identifies and

³⁸⁸ Steve McIntyre, 'Inventing the future - *in praise of small films*', in *Scottish Film & Visual Arts*, n. 5 (3rd Quarter 1993), pg. 19; see also McIntyre, 'Vanishing point: feature film production in a small country', in John Hill, Martin McLoone & Paul Hainsworth (eds.), *Border Crossing: Film in Ireland, Britain and Europe* (Belfast/London: Institute of Irish Studies/University of Ulster/BFI, 1994), pp. 88-111; McIntyre, 'Art and Industry: regional film and video policy in the UK', in Albert Moran (ed.), *Film Policy: International, National and Regional Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 215-233.

³⁸⁹ Quoted in Petrie, *Screening...*, op. cit., pg. 184.

praises as Scottish Screen's "increasingly professional"³⁹⁰ engagement with local screen industries during the late '90s was not, and could never have been, an ideologically neutered phenomenon. 'Professional' institutional approaches to the development of Scottish cinema in this period may have proclaimed themselves untainted by economically irrational and/or unviable ideological or cultural wish lists. That proclamation was, however, itself symptomatic of the wider, ideologically partisan free market *mentalité* that gave birth to Scottish Screen. The rhetoric of 'professionalism', like that of 'The Market', typically seeks to legitimate itself as the pragmatic epitome of commonsense and rationality. Indeed, despite McIntyre's protestations, the experience and perceptions of some local filmmakers working with Scottish Screen during the late '90s demonstrated that the institution was engaged – whether always in full consciousness or not - in an 'editorialising' preferment of certain modes of feature production defined both by economic scale and generic/aesthetic form. Such forms of preferment, examined in the next section of this chapter, had material consequences for Scottish cinema's cultural and industrial development during the late '90s. Some of these consequences seem in retrospect anything but commonsensical. Appropriately enough, both this process and the uncertain status of Scottish Screen, appear at their clearest when attention turns to the most financially significant institutional development witnessed in late '90s Scotland, the advent of National Lottery funding for indigenous feature production.

Scottish Cinema according to Bill, not Michael: the National Lottery and Scottish Stand

The quantum upsurge in Scottish feature production during the late '90s was in large part facilitated by the Major government's 1994 creation of the National Lottery, and the administration's decision a year later to allocate a portion of Lottery revenues to film production funds administered by the UK's various national Arts Councils (England,

³⁹⁰ Ibid, pg. 222.

Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales).³⁹¹ In 1995, the precise scale of the public monies to be injected into indigenous production by the new Scottish Arts Council National Lottery Fund was unpredictable. At that point in time, the SFPF hoped for a minimum of £1.5-2m.³⁹² Yet the Lottery Fund quickly surpassed such expectations, becoming the most significant single financial patron of late '90s Scottish cinema. By 1998, the fund had already made production grants worth a total of £13.5m, with a further £12.75m forecast between that year and early 2003.³⁹³

When Lottery revenues first became available to subsidise film production in Scotland, the SAC and SFPF jointly established the National Lottery Funding Panel to administer and distribute funds to suitable applicants. By 1997, the Panel had already allocated some £12m to a range of local feature projects then in development. Ultimately, Lottery funds contributed just over £9.43m of public monies to 15 wholly or part Scottish funded features actually produced between 1995 and mid 2000.³⁹⁴ Yet the Lottery's status for the local filmmakers who stood to benefit from it during this period was paradoxical. It represented both the single greatest source of financial opportunity in late '90s Scotland *and* the acutest indicator that Scottish film culture's institutional development was taking place in ways that creative personnel found troubling.

The most notorious late '90s example of suspicious, even downright hostile, relations between Scottish filmmakers and new local institutions involved Scottish cinema's 'father figure', writer/director Bill Forsyth, and the original Lottery Panel. The former very publicly complained about what he saw as the latter's questionable distribution of Lottery monies during the first eighteen months or so of its working life. Ironically, Forsyth was one of those who benefited significantly from late-'90s Lottery largesse: his sequel to *Gregory's Girl*, *Gregory's 2 Girls* (GB/Ger, 1999), was part-funded by a £1m

³⁹¹ For further detail on the Lottery and its connection to both Scottish and UK film funding, see John Hill, 'Contemporary British Cinema: Industry, Policy, Identity', in *Cineaste*, Vol. XXVI n. 4 (Fall 2001), *Contemporary British Cinema Supplement*, pg. 32; Petrie, *Screening...*, op. cit., pp. 176-77.

³⁹² See Hunter, op. cit., pg. 13.

³⁹³ Anon, 'SAC may spread cash more thinly', in *Screen Finance*, Vol. 11. 4 (19/2/98), pg. 3.

³⁹⁴ Figures quoted in or derived from Petrie, *Screening...*, op. cit., pp. 177; 227-8.

Lottery grant.³⁹⁵ Yet when he originally submitted a working script for *Gregory's 2 Girls* to the Lottery Panel in June 1996, the project was refused funding. Despite this, Forsyth was invited to join the seven-strong awarding body that August. He attended one panel meeting before resigning in December of the same year. Forsyth complained that major Lottery awards were consistently being made to feature projects associated with panel members: £1m each to *The Life of Stuff* - producer Lynda Myles—*Regeneration* (Gillies Mackinnon, GB/Can, 1997)—screenwriter Allan Shiach—and *The Silver Darlings*—producer John McGrath. Forsyth claimed in public that such awards constituted evidence of endemic cronyism in the distribution of Lottery funds.³⁹⁶ The subsequent media controversy led to John McGrath's angry resignation from the Lottery panel. Vehemently rejecting Forsyth's allegations, he nonetheless returned his Lottery award for *The Silver Darlings* in February 1997.³⁹⁷

In June 1997, during the immediate aftermath of this very public contretemps, Forsyth, director Charlie Gormley and producers Christopher Young and Peter Broughan (the latter a former SFPF board member) formed Scottish Stand, a local filmmakers' pressure group.³⁹⁸ Forsyth's individual, and still-contentious, concern about the transparency and accountability of the original Lottery awards process³⁹⁹ was thus quickly extrapolated into a more organised and collective expression of local filmmakers' anxieties about the emergent new institutional direction of Scottish cinema generally. Specifically, Scottish Stand criticised what it saw as the dominance of internationally fixated free market discourses within infant organisations like the Lottery Panel and Scottish Screen. The perception was that disproportionate concentration on the attraction of lucrative inward investment in Scotland's audiovisual industries via mobile production was sidelining the systematic development of creative and business opportunities for indigenous productions and personnel.

³⁹⁵ Ibid, pg. 228.

³⁹⁶ See Allan Brown & Brian Pendreigh, 'The Forsyth Saga', in *The Sunday Times*, (4/4/99), *Ecosse* section, pg. 2.

³⁹⁷ Chris Starrs, 'McGrath U-turn in film storm', in *The Herald*, (3/2/97), pg. 3.

³⁹⁸ For the formation of Scottish Stand and its initial public pronouncements, see Allan Laing, 'Scots bid to ensure a fair cut', in *The Herald*, (21/5/97), pg. 3; Anon, 'Taking a stand on film funding', in *The Herald*, (6/6/97), pg. 10; Laing, 'Time to stand and deliver', in *The Herald*, (19/8/97), pg. 13.

³⁹⁹ See Bill Forsyth, 'Letter', in *The Herald*, (17/5/97), pg. 16.

Even before becoming involved with Scottish Stand, for example, Peter Broughan argued that the early activities of the Lottery Panel constituted a microcosmic example of a more general and unsatisfactory set of local institutional priorities at work in contemporary Scotland. In August 1997, he protested that Lottery monies so far distributed had mostly been directed towards non-Scottish based production companies and feature projects. From an inward investment-orientated perspective, the boost that such projects gave to the volume of local production activity and associated freelance employment opportunities were certainly to be welcomed. However, more important for Broughan was the fact that “very little” of the new source of public finance represented by the Lottery was “feeding into the Scottish film economy[’s]”⁴⁰⁰ long-term internal development, or at least, its development as something other than a service sector for other national film industries. He was thus adamant about the need for,

A rule, which ensures that only productions that come through a Scottish production company should be considered for [Lottery] finance... Otherwise you have Scottish money being used by people who don’t have a commitment to Scotland. All you end up with is a carpetbagging process.⁴⁰¹

Christopher Young, the producer of *Gregory’s 2 Girls*, echoed these sentiments. He argued that many of the most prominent mid ’90s ‘Scottish’ films, such as *Braveheart* with its remarkable, externally dictated influence on local institutional development, or the Oscar-nominated *Mrs Brown*,

are a bit meaningless... non-resident successes... If we have to make a great thing about how well we are doing by referring to London-based production companies having successful films

⁴⁰⁰ Quoted in Allan Hunter, ‘Regeneration’, in *Screen International*, n. 1120 (8/8/97), pg. 17.

⁴⁰¹ Quoted in William Russell, ‘Big fight over reel funding issue’, in *The Herald*, (21/1/97), pg. 13. My insert.

shot in Scotland, then we are never going to have a film community.⁴⁰²

An analogous retrospective analysis of the '90s was offered by Peter Mullan in 2003, when he identified filmmakers from south of the border, heavily supported by metropolitan capital, as the key catalysts for the new 'Scottish' Cinema:

In Scotland, we're a colony in more ways than one... For me the two most important directors in Scotland in the past 15 years have both been English, Danny Boyle [Figment Films, Channel 4] and Ken Loach [Parallax Pictures, Channel 4]. They were the ones who let us out of the cage.⁴⁰³

In the logic of Scottish Stand and others, therefore, the rapidly increasing amount of production activity taking place in Scotland due to the Lottery was a double-edged sword. It masked the extent to which the new institutions which were overseeing this expansion did not give due attention to the systematic fostering and expansion of opportunities for locally based production companies and creative personnel.

The perceived external siphoning of vital production funds was not local filmmakers' sole grievance regarding the Lottery. Moving beyond Forsyth's catalytic allegations of cronyism, many argued that the most problematic aspect of the dispensation of big Lottery awards to a small number of beneficiaries was not Panel members' conflicts of interest, real or imagined. Rather, it was that both the Panel and applicants to it were, in the aftermath of *Shallow Grave*, *Rob Roy* and *Trainspotting*, preparing and assessing funding applications with reference to notional criteria of international commercial appeal which were as materially unrealistic as they were culturally problematic. Certainly, the budget levels of late '90s Lottery beneficiaries typically multiplied the low

⁴⁰² Quoted in Allan Hunter, 'The flowering of Scotland?', in *Screen International*, n. 1171 (14/8/98), pg. 12.

⁴⁰³ Quoted in Simon Hattenstone, 'Guardian NFT Interview with Peter Mullan' (4/11/03), @ <http://www.film.guardian.co.uk/print/0,3858,4795691-101730,00.html> <accessed 11/9/04>. My inserts.

budgets of *Shallow Grave* and *Trainspotting* by factors of two, three or more: *Regeneration* (£3.9m), *The Winter Guest* (Alan Rickman, GB/USA, 1997) (£5m), *Complicity* (Gavin Millar, GB, 2000) (£4.6m) were symptomatic of the rapid inflation in feature budget levels witnessed in Scotland after 1995.⁴⁰⁴ As seen in the previous chapter, the most perceptive pre-'95 industrial commentary on Scotland dismissed the commercial viability of these kinds of budgets out of hand, given the potential income levels that might realistically be at best expected from the Scottish and British theatrical markets.⁴⁰⁵ Sadly, the underwhelming typical box office performance of the first wave of Scottish Lottery features bore this belief out: *Regeneration* (£0.206m), *The Winter Guest* (£0.25m), *Complicity* (£93 506), *The Life of Stuff* (£4438), *The Slab Boys* (£15 991).⁴⁰⁶ Between 1995 and 2001, only 9.05% of the cumulative total of Scottish Lottery funding investments had been recouped through the beneficiaries' performance at the box office and other ancillary markets.⁴⁰⁷

Moreover, some local filmmakers argued that this early Lottery funding strategy was not just commercially dubious; the concentration of available moneys into a small number of £1m grants also inhibited the expansion of low budget feature-making opportunities for Scottish filmmakers. Producer Jim Hickey, for example, complained that the Lottery Panel's early predilection for £1m grants showed that the body "probably would not use that money to give £150 000 each to six new filmmakers and let them make a low budget feature".⁴⁰⁸ It was precisely this kind of production activity Hickey was engaged in, although it should be noted that he eventually received £399 000 of Lottery monies for *Daybreak* (Bernard Rudden, GB, 2000), a £1 million feature, which subsequently failed to secure a UK distribution deal.

⁴⁰⁴ See Eddie Dyja (ed.), *The BFI Film and Television Handbook 1998* (London: BFI, 1997), pp. 22; 26; Dyja (ed.), *The BFI Film and Television Handbook 2001* (London: BFI, 2000), pg. 24.

⁴⁰⁵ See, for example, McIntyre, 'Vanishing...', op. cit.

⁴⁰⁶ See Eddie Dyja (ed.), *The BFI Film and Television Handbook 1999*, op. cit., pg. 33; Dyja (ed.), *BFI Film and Television Handbook 2000* (London: BFI, 1999), pg. 32; Dyja (ed.), *The BFI Film and Television Handbook 2002* (London: BFI, 2001), pg. 40; Brian Pendreigh, 'Will this X-rated woman save the Scottish film industry?', in *The Scotsman*, (30/10/98), pg. 33.

⁴⁰⁷ For details, see Tim Adler, 'Scottish Lottery bodies only recoup 15% of investment', in *Screen Finance*, Vol. 16 n. 19 (22/10/03), pg. 6.

⁴⁰⁸ Hunter, 'Regeneration', op. cit., pg. 17.

The central point to establish here, however, is that the first National Lottery Panel appears to have drawn some rather dubious conclusions from the mid-decade successes of *Shallow Grave* and *Trainspotting*. The idea that the Scottish production sector needed to go on embracing and appropriating its traditional financial marginality in a creatively and commercially entrepreneurial sense—simply by keeping feature budgets below £2m, if nothing else—unfortunately did not find favour. What prevailed was a much more speculative strategy. In this line of thinking the low-budget indigenous successes and visiting Hollywood studio projects of 1995/96 were a springboard for Scotland to *transcend* its traditional industrial insignificance. Such transcendence would in part be achieved through a subsidised inflation of typical indigenous feature budget levels from the low into the medium range found within the UK film industry as a whole. Such inflation was intended to give local films the ability to regularly ‘cross over’ from art house exhibition circuits into the commercial mainstream, thanks to their enhanced production values and/or the presence of ‘name’ actors.

However, initial Lottery activity was also influenced by other misinterpretations of early '90s achievements, including those to do with the utility of script development and structure within an industrially marginal national film culture. As seen in the previous chapter, the unprecedented successes of *Shallow Grave* and *Rob Roy* resulted from the equally novel pre-production processes of script development both films were subjected to by the creative and institutional personnel involved. For some, therefore, continuing local development of script skills was an essential precondition for Scottish cinema's long-term consolidation. As the introduction to the present work noted, perhaps the most voluble and active proponent of the gospel of script in '90s Scotland was John McGrath, the founder of the Moonstone International scriptwriting laboratory. In 2001, McGrath set out his position in uncompromising terms:

Before we start talking about funding... we should be concentrating on the screenplays... It's the writers who will lead Scotland's cinematic renaissance. Writing good screenplays

should be priority number one. After that we can start spending money on making them into films.⁴⁰⁹

What is curious about the 15-strong list of features supported by Scottish Lottery monies between 1995 and 2000 is that it tries to accede to McGrath's belief about the centrality of good script practice for Scottish cinema through repeated recourse to non-cinematic local writers and texts. While the pre-'95 successes of *Rob Roy* and *Shallow Grave* emerged from original scripts written specifically for the cinema screen, 8 of the first 15 Lottery-supported Scottish features were adaptations of pre-existing literary works: *The Slab Boys* (theatrical trilogy by Byrne himself), *Regeneration* (novel by Pat Barker), *The Winter Guest* (play by Sharman Macdonald), *The Life of Stuff* (play by Simon Donald), *The Acid House* (short stories by Irvine Welsh), *My Life So Far* (Hugh Hudson, GB/USA, 1999) (autobiography by Denis Forman), *Complicity* (novel by Iain Banks), *House of Mirth* (Terence Davies, GB/USA, 2000) (novel by Edith Wharton). Moreover, 5 of the 15 films in question were scripted by writers whose professional reputations were primarily or solely as novelists and/or playwrights, not screenwriters: *The Winter Guest* (Sharman Macdonald and Alan Rickman), *The Life of Stuff* (Simon Donald), *Stella Does Tricks* (Coky Giedroyc, GB, 1998) (A. L. Kennedy), *The Acid House* (Irvine Welsh), *My Life So Far* (Simon Donald).

Certainly, Lottery monies also supported the fledgling careers of a number of important local screenwriters, such as Paul Laverty (*My Name is Joe*) and Peter Mullan (*Orphans*). Yet given the rhetorical heat and light generated within 1990s Scottish film culture about script as the cornerstone of all other production activities, it is surprising to discover that only 41% of the £9.43 million of Lottery funds allocated to successfully produced features between 1995 and 2000 supported projects developed from original screenplays produced by dedicated screenwriters.⁴¹⁰ This may well prove explicable, however, as another microcosmic instance of the reductive mercantilism which exerted considerable clout within Scottish film institutions generally during the period in question, and against

⁴⁰⁹ John McGrath, 'Manifesto', in *Product*, n. 5 (Winter 2000/01), pg. 20.

⁴¹⁰ Figures quoted in or derived from Petrie, *Screening...*, pp. 177; 227-8.

which many local filmmakers complained. Lottery funding's persistent association with texts and/or writers from Scottish literary culture seems to have resulted from a bowdlerisation of the (valuable) awareness of script and story as tradable commodities which had taken root in the early '90s. The assumption seems to have been that the prior artistic reputation and popularity of existing literary texts and/or writers would by default transfer itself to Scottish Lottery-supported features associated with and/or adapted from these already market-tested phenomena. As early as 1997, one perceptive observer bemoaned the Lottery Panel's

preference for adaptations of novels or plays, rather than original works, as if this were a safer option. If you had been a trio of unknown hopefuls touting a black comedy called *Shallow Grave*, you wouldn't have stood a chance.⁴¹¹

Repeated institutional recourse to this shortcut to 'good' Scottish script practice may be one reason why, at the end of a decade in which questions of script structure and development were locally aired as never before, complaints that "we [in Scotland] are unable to craft the script... screenplays have become notable for their underdevelopment"⁴¹² were still being made with regularity.

While the questionable preferment of funding applications with marked literary connections continued right to the end of the '90s, many of the other above-noted contemporary misgivings about the direction of and rationale behind early Scottish Lottery awards became too acute to ignore. For example, the SAC set up a Film Production Committee in September 1997, to assess the processing of applications to the Lottery Panel, thus reflecting Scottish Stand and others' distrust of the SFPP's previous sole administration of the body.⁴¹³ Subsequent SAC policy changes also directly responded to local filmmakers' anxieties over the telescoping of Lottery monies in a small number of large awards, with the implicit privileging of comparatively high-cost,

⁴¹¹ Brian Pendreigh, 'Film lottery winners turn into losers', in *The Scotsman*, (2/10/97), pg. 19.

⁴¹² Gareth Wardell, 'The Big Picture', in *Cencrastus*, n. 68 (2001), pg. 11. My insert.

⁴¹³ Allan Hunter, 'SAC sets up Lottery watchdog', in *Screen International*, n. 1124 (5/9/97), pg. 4.

quasi-international commercial production this seemed to imply. In February 1998, maximum Lottery awards were reduced from £1 to £0.5m. At the same time, the SAC also tentatively proposed that 20 % of available Lottery monies be ring-fenced for feature projects whose primary merits were understood to involve cultural or experimental considerations, as opposed to a straightforward expectation of commercial profit. The SAC also promised to commit Lottery funding at an earlier stage in development to culturally, as opposed to commercially, orientated projects. This attempted to make the producers of this type of work better able to effectively lever funding from other sources. Finally, in June 1999, the SAC and Scottish Screen announced the launch of Twenty First Films, a funding scheme aiming to provide up to 75% of production budgets or a maximum of £0.3 million in the financing of projects budgeted at, or under, £0.6m.⁴¹⁴ Commenting on some of these changes in 2000, John Archer, the first Chief Executive of Scottish Screen, conceded that the original SFPF Lottery funding structures had made it “quite easy for others to come in and cherry pick [funding] and for it not to benefit indigenous productions”.⁴¹⁵ By 2001, Archer was presenting the institutional priorities now driving the dispensation of Scottish Lottery monies in terms of the “develop[ment] of indigenous talent... essentially a cultural subsidy approach with hopes of an economic development spin-off”.⁴¹⁶ This was, of course, precisely the institutional order of priorities that local filmmakers had complained was absent in the years immediately after 1995. The evolutionary trajectory of local institutional rhetoric surrounding the Lottery - bullish, hyperbolic mercantilism becoming increasingly questioned and qualified as the decade drew to a close - characterised other important, contemporaneous debates about film production infrastructure in late '90s Scotland. Perhaps the most important of these relates to ongoing, vexed attempts to establish major studio facilities in the country.

⁴¹⁴ Anon, ‘SAC...’, op. cit., pg. 2; Brian Pendreigh, ‘Going cheap’, in *The Herald*, (17/6/99), n. pg. ref. (Glasgow University Library online newspaper archive).

⁴¹⁵ Quoted in James Hamilton, ‘Northern Star’, in *Creation*, (May 2000), pg. 15.

⁴¹⁶ John Archer, ‘British Cinema Questionnaire’, in *Cineaste*, Vol. XXVI n. 4 (Fall 2001), *Contemporary British Cinema Supplement*, pg. 64.

Hollywood, come to the Highlands: the Scottish studio debate

The late '90s was a period which saw repeated institutional expressions of interest in the establishment of international studio facilities in Scotland. Various multi-million pound schemes abounded: one located in Inverness, backed by actor James Cosmo and musician Dave Stewart; a private consortium, the Scottish Film Studio Partnership, proposed a vertiginously ambitious £225m studio, hotel and leisure complex near Aberuthven in Perthshire; Scottish Screen and the Scottish Executive were reported as backing a development at Pacific Quay in Glasgow, involving the transfer of BBC Scotland from its established base in the city's West End. To date, only the latter proposal has materialised in any form at all, let alone that originally envisaged.⁴¹⁷ Just as with concurrent debates surrounding the dispensation of Lottery monies, institutional enthusiasm for major studio facilities made many uneasy. This was because they saw it as indicative of the hegemony enjoyed by a mercantilist, inward investment-based development agenda that was, at very best, tangential to the aspirations and needs of domestic filmmakers and independent production companies.

As with other important late '90s institutional developments and debates, the studio question gained impetus from the circumstances surrounding *Braveheart*'s production; notoriously, more location shooting for that film took place in the Republic of Ireland than in Scotland.⁴¹⁸ The most popular explanation for this 'travesty' centred on the influence of tax breaks on film production-related investment offered by the Irish government since 1987. In 1995, Celia Stevenson, then of Scottish Screen Locations, explained that with regards to *Braveheart*,

⁴¹⁷ For details, see Anon, 'Edinburgh studio could be open by 2001' (2/11/98), @ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/206282.stm> <accessed 2/11/98>; Pauline McLean, '£255m studio plan for Scotland' (21/10/99), @ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/480294.stm> <accessed 21/10/99>; Phil Miller, 'Eurythmics star backs film studio', in *The Sunday Times*, (21/4/01), n. pg. ref (Glasgow University Library online newspaper archive).

⁴¹⁸ For details, see Paddy Barrett, 'Gibson drops UK for Ireland', in *Screen International*, n. 957 (13/5/94), pg. 1; Barrett, 'Braveheart', in *Screen International*, n. 974 (9/9/94), p. 20.

Ireland could offer what we could with jam on top... tremendous tax breaks under their Section 35 tax clause... in any business the bottom line is what counts in the end.⁴¹⁹

Quite understandably, this concentrated institutional minds on the question of Scotland's proven competitive disadvantages to an immediately adjacent competitor for international location work and inward investment. The specific obstacle encountered with *Braveheart* was an insurmountable one, however. Ireland, a politically independent as opposed to stateless nation, enjoyed sufficient control over domestic fiscal policy to legislate into existence the tax breaks that attracted mobile productions to that country.⁴²⁰

Unsurprisingly, Scottish Secretary of Michael Forsyth's post-*Braveheart* enthusiasm for all things filmic was not pronounced enough to overturn the British Unionist allegiances that underpinned his political worldview: quasi-autonomous divergences from Westminster fiscal policy were emphatically not on the agenda. Yet this dictated that alternative solutions to the problem of Scotland's perceived disadvantage at the hands of the Irish film industry be found.

In answer to this conundrum, 1997 saw the Scottish Office commission a feasibility study on the establishment of major studio facilities in Scotland.⁴²¹ This came hard on the heels of £3m of additional government funding pledged for screen industry initiatives in Scotland the year previous.⁴²² The political interest and will to action manifest in such government initiatives was welcome; more contentious, however, was the unalloyed free market, inward investment-orientated approach to the consolidation of the Scottish film production sector which underpinned them. In 1996, Alan Shiach, Chair of the soon-to-disappear SFC, cheerfully explained that increasing government interest in Scotland's audiovisual industries was predicated on the belief that, in the immediate wake of 1995/96's *annus mirabilis*, cinema was now "an appropriate industry for development

⁴¹⁹ Quoted in Ruth Wishart, 'Oiling the bandwagon', in *The Herald*, (16/9/95), pg. 15.

⁴²⁰ For an extended comparative discussion of Scottish and Irish film cultures, see Jonathan Murray, 'Sibling rivalry? Contemporary Scottish and Irish cinemas', in Liam McIlvanney and Ray Ryan (eds.), *Ireland and Scotland: Culture and Society, 1707-2000* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2005), pp. 144-163.

⁴²¹ Stewart Kemp, 'Scottish film receives triple cash boost', in *Screen International*, n. 1109 (23/5/97), pg. 2.

⁴²² Allan Hunter, '\$4. 5 million boost for Scottish film', in *Screen International*, n. 1055 (26/4/96), pg. 14.

and expansion”⁴²³ As noted above, the ‘newness’ of this “new thinking about film and its contribution to the national economy and culture”⁴²⁴ derived from its entirely confident prosecution of a relatively well-funded mercantile agenda for public subsidy of Scottish film culture. Such ‘new thinking’ supplanted traditionally influential but materially penurious political justifications of subsidy in terms of national cultural expression and preservation.

Attempts to establish international studio facilities remained The Impossible Dream for institutional policy-makers throughout the rest of the 1990s, however. In 1998, Kevin Kane, formerly of the GFF but now Head of Scottish Enterprise’s Film Unit, argued the need for major studio facilities was no more than an acknowledgement of the demands created by the “real breakthrough in Scotland” experienced over the last half-decade or so:

In the early nineties, when we started getting involved with the Glasgow Development Agency in terms of looking at film locations, the last thing we would have looked at was a film studio. But now the infrastructure, the demand, and the skills are there for it to be realistic.⁴²⁵

That same year, James Lee, Chair of Scottish Screen, proffered the carrot, proposing that such ambitious pipedreams would possess “symbolic significance... a centre of gravity for things to coalesce around”⁴²⁶ in Scotland’s fast-growing film production sector. Lee stated that he saw this hypothetical set of facilities as emerging from “a private sector initiative with strong European and Scottish Office backing [although] my home run really is to attract one of the Hollywood majors to want to be a partner”.⁴²⁷ A year later, Scottish Screen Chief Executive John Archer waved the stick, arguing that Scotland’s

⁴²³ Alan Shiach, ‘Chairman’s Introduction’, *Scottish Film Council Annual Review 1996* (Glasgow: Scottish Film Council, 1996), pg. 2.

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

⁴²⁵ Quoted in Alexander Linklater, ‘To put a kilt on the reel thing’, in *The Herald*, (31/3/98), pg. 11.

⁴²⁶ Quoted in Hunter, ‘Flowering...’, op. cit., pg. 11.

⁴²⁷ Quoted in Brian Pendreigh, ‘Isn’t it time Scotland had a real film studio?’, in *The Scotsman*, (25/9/98), pg. 29.

ongoing lack of international studio facilities formed “a major obstacle”⁴²⁸ to significant long-term expansion of the country’s audiovisual industries. For Archer, this rendered proposals to build a film and television studio complex at Glasgow’s Pacific Quay, part-financed by £6m of public money invested by Scottish Screen and BBC Scotland, “a capital project vital to Scotland... a public investment in the country’s industrial infrastructure”.⁴²⁹ Yet for many indigenous filmmakers, the clarity of the fact that institutional personnel believed a studio would benefit Scotland was matched only by the murky confusion surrounding the reasons why they thought this was so.

Once again, those associated with Scottish Screen suspected that institutional enthusiasm for studio facilities was due to the dominance of a damagingly one-sided free mercantile agenda. The costs involved in hiring studio facilities of an international standard would, it was believed, be so prohibitive as to effectively render the former a resource for mobile productions, not an indirect form of state subsidy for locally based filmmakers. Peter Broughan, for example, acknowledged that a locally-based studio would be a “highly desirable” stimulant for inward investment in Scotland, but argued that this must be “allied to other initiatives that stimulate... the Scottish film industry”⁴³⁰, especially if as feared, low budget indigenous productions were effectively priced out of access to any major studio facilities which might eventually be built. In 1999, Neil McCartney, editor of trade journal *Screen Finance*, went further, arguing that,

Right now there is a very high level of film-making in Scotland anyway [and] some of these films don't really have much requirement for studios... films like *Trainspotting* and *Shallow Grave* didn't use purpose-built studios at all... very often filmmakers would prefer to, say, convert an old warehouse or an

⁴²⁸ John Archer, ‘Put us in the picture’, in *The Herald*, (27/9/99), n. pg. ref. (Glasgow University Library online newspaper archive).

⁴²⁹ Ibid.

⁴³⁰ Peter Broughan quoted in Hunter, ‘Flowering...’, op. cit., pg. 11.

empty school and that might be cheaper than going to a purpose-built studio.⁴³¹

Christopher Young concurred, praising the 1990s Scottish tradition of converting derelict warehouse space into ad hoc studio facilities, as was the case, for example, with *Shallow Grave*, *Trainspotting*, *Regeneration*, *Slab Boys* and *Orphans*. For Young, this owed less to Scotland's chronic infrastructural underdevelopment and more to an economically and aesthetically resourceful engagement with the financial realities of indigenous production budgets. Young was seeking this kind of arrangement in 1999 for his then-current project, *The Final Curtain* (Patrick Harkins, GB/USA, 2002).⁴³²

On his accession to the Chief Executive post at Scottish Screen in summer 2001, Steve McIntyre reiterated the organisation's continuing commitment to the establishment of international studio facilities in Scotland. Significantly, however, he tempered this with an explicit acknowledgement that such resources, if they ever came to pass, needed somehow to be placed at the disposal of low budget local productions as well as larger mobile shoots: "we need to balance keeping the costs low but making the studio big enough to attract business from overseas".⁴³³ In October 2002, however, something of a line was drawn under the studio debate, when Scottish Enterprise made public the results of a feasibility study, the conclusions of which were markedly less hyperbolic than much of the institutional rhetoric which circulated during the late '90s. The organisation's Director of Creative Industries pronounced in forthright terms that, "We do not believe Scotland can sustain a film studio. In reality, it is not a massive industry, is cyclical, and globally competitive".⁴³⁴ While Scottish Enterprise did not wholly discount the viability or desirability of a studio *per se*, they argued that any facilities which were built should aim to service the needs of the domestic television and advertising industries, rather than the heady heights of major international film production. For some observers, the

⁴³¹ Quoted in McLean, '£255m studio plan for Scotland', op. cit.

⁴³² Ibid, pg. 11; see also Anon, 'Make-or-break for Connery studio', in *Screen Finance*, Vol. 12. 11 (10/6/99), pg. 9.

⁴³³ Quoted in Jim McLean, 'Screen chief will fight for national film studio', in *The Herald*, (31/8/01), n. pg. ref. (Glasgow University Library online newspaper archive).

⁴³⁴ David Reilly quoted in Iain Wilson, 'Curtain falls on plan for national film studio', in *The Herald*, (9/10/02), pg. 5.

apparent settling of the studio question in the negative came as relief. Allan Hunter concluded that, “after years of extensive feasibility studies, high hopes and grand designs, [this] announcement... should be received with a sigh of relief”. Hunter argued that in the early '00s, the terms of debate surrounding the development of Scottish cinema should distance themselves from the internationally-orientated free market model which had held such sway during the late '90s:

If there is public money available to inject into the film industry then let's spend it on training schemes, script development, education, exhibition, keeping companies afloat during tough times or direct production funding rather than an impressive pile of bricks and mortar.⁴³⁵

The late '90s studio debate therefore looks significant for two main reasons, then. First, it illustrates what increasingly looks like a representative trajectory to local institutional debates and initiatives during the period, hyperbolic entrepreneurialism being superseded by a markedly more cautious approach. Second, despite the fact that the studio debate was inaugurated by the Scottish Office under Michael Forsyth, it long outlasted his departure from office in 1997. This fact points us towards a wider political issue with import for Scottish cinema of the period. 1997 was the year in which an ostensible changing of the political guard took place in the UK, with a Labour government elected at Westminster, and that administration's legislation for Scottish devolution. Yet despite this apparently tectonic political shift, many if not most of the items on Forsyth's free market governmental agenda for cinema survived his political demise. Consideration of devolution's impact upon Scottish film culture shows the extent to which this was so.

⁴³⁵ Allan Hunter, 'Why a film studio would project the wrong image for Scotland', in *Scotland on Sunday*, (13/10/02), pg. 4.

A Devolved Cinema? Government policy and late 1990s Scottish film culture

What has perhaps become contemporary Scottish film criticism's best-known utterance is also one of its most audacious. Duncan Petrie famously characterised Scottish cinema at the end of the '90s as "a distinct and meaningful entity... in terms of a devolved British cinema rather than [a] fully independent entity".⁴³⁶ On one hand, this is nothing more than an admirably nuanced acknowledgement of Scottish filmmakers and film institutions' continuing and inevitable subsumation within the British film industry as a whole. On the other, however, it attempts to argue for a direct causal relationship between the respective ideological characters of institutional evolution and cultural production within contemporary Scotland. Petrie's calculated use of the 'devolved' tag carries with it a strongly (N/n)ationalist implication. This is that emergent Scottish audiovisual cultures and 'post-British' national identities and political structures are, or at very least *should be*, projects that proceed hand in glove with one another. When Petrie argues that "the issue of [Scotland's post-1979] cultural 'revival'... is also necessarily bound up with the assertion of cultural difference [and] political self determination"⁴³⁷, he is proposing that Scotland's discovery (or, if you prefer, recovery) of its distinctive cinematic and political voices in recent years are but two sides of the same national coin; the success of one goal cannot be maintained without, and is explicable through, that of the other.

This universalising view of late twentieth-century national history, which advances the thesis that "if Scotland voted for *political* devolution in 1997, it had much earlier declared *cultural* devolution"⁴³⁸, has become a hegemonic one within the study of contemporary Scottish culture generally. The election of a British Labour government in 1997 and the subsequent creation of a devolved political settlement for Scotland were contemporaneously perceived as an epochal changing of the political guard within the

⁴³⁶ Petrie, *Screening...*, op. cit., pg. 186.

⁴³⁷ Duncan Petrie, *Contemporary Scottish Fictions: Film, Television and the Novel* (Edinburgh: EUP, 2004), pg. 2. My inserts.

⁴³⁸ Cairns Craig, 'Scotland: Culture after Devolution', in Edna Longley, Eamonn Hughes & Des O'Riordan (eds.), *Ireland (Ulster) Scotland: Concepts, Contexts, Comparisons* (Belfast: Cló Ollscoil na Banríona, 2003), pg. 39.

UK. The achievement of devolution is often presented as the fruits of a hostile Scottish reaction to two decades of 'alien' free market ideologies permeating all areas of national life at the behest of four successive British Conservative administrations. Yet, as with the other specific institutional case studies explored in this chapter, consideration of political devolution's impact upon late '90s Scottish film culture uncovers a more complex picture. This is one in which the assumed casual relationship between institutional developments and cultural production fails to materialise, and where early free market-style optimism is latterly replaced by a more cautious and critical viewpoint.

After the passing at Westminster of the 1997 Scotland Act, the first elections for a directly elected, devolved Scottish Executive and parliament took place in 1999. The Scottish Labour party emerged as the major partners in a coalition administration with the Liberal Democrats.⁴³⁹ Disappointingly, what little constituted the first Executive's film policy during its 1999-2003 term of office was wholly structured within a pre-existing Forsythian discourse. This privileged the attraction of increasing amounts of film-related inward investment into the Scottish economy, with no substantive regard for film or national cultural considerations. With specific regard to Scottish film culture, 1997 can in retrospect be seen as marking a transfer of political power, but not a transfusion of new political thinking.

For example, on April 11th 2000, Henry McLeish, then-Executive Enterprise Minister, waxed lyrical in familiar terms about the financial attractions of a notional figure he dubbed "the filmmaker coming to Scotland".⁴⁴⁰ Launching (symptomatically enough) the *Scottish Film Locations Brochure*, an informational resource predominantly geared towards mobile producers, the Minister argued that, "by encouraging more companies to make movies in Scotland we will... boost tourism, create employment and generate income for our economy".⁴⁴¹ McLeish remained silent, however, on Executive thinking

⁴³⁹ For an accessible account of the Westminster legislation that brought both the 1997 devolution referendum and then Scotland's newly devolved political settlement into being, see Brian Taylor, *The Scottish Parliament* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1999).

⁴⁴⁰ Quoted in Anon, 'Scotland takes centre stage' (11/4/00), @ http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/uk/scotland/newsid_709000/709163.stm <accessed 11/04/00>

⁴⁴¹ Quoted in Ibid.

about the support—financial or otherwise—that might be provided for the ‘filmmaker coming *from* Scotland’, a figure continuing to struggle within significant economic and infrastructural constraints. Despite their ideological enmities on a host of other issues, McLeish, like Forsyth before him, gave voice to a shared Scottish governmental understanding of cinema. Films were little if anything more than consumer goods; their sole function was to financially profit the national economy within which they were manufactured or the national culture their narratives depicted. For example, films such as *Braveheart* and *Rob Roy* had proved of material benefit to sectors of the country’s economy other than those related to audiovisual production. These two major mobile productions raised tourist expenditure in the regions of Scotland in which they were filmed to a significant degree. Visitor figures to the Wallace Monument in Stirling, for example, rose from 55 000 in 1994 to 150 000 in 1996.⁴⁴² Such film-related financial windfalls over and above local production-related spend tempted the new Scottish Executive to adopt what was by now an established free mercantile, externally focused approach to the development of the Scottish audiovisual industries.

It is in this context that we should read the *sole* mention of cinema in the first Executive’s major cultural policy initiative, the *National Cultural Strategy* document of 2000. As can easily be seen, the preferred political logic of 1996/97 had survived its individual authors’ term of office:

Recently, Scotland has been successful in attracting film and television programme makers to shoot and produce work here. In addition to direct economic and cultural benefits, this work helps to promote Scotland as a tourist location. We therefore aim to make Scotland film-friendly. To achieve this we shall support the development by Scottish Screen of a Film Charter for Scotland and initiatives to establish a Scottish film studio.⁴⁴³

⁴⁴² See Tim Edensor, ‘Reading *Braveheart*: Representing and Contesting Scottish Identity’, in *Scottish Affairs*, n. 21 (Autumn 1997), pg. 145.

⁴⁴³ Scottish Executive, *Creating Our Future... Minding Our Past: Scotland's National Cultural Strategy*, @ <http://195.92.250.59/nationalculturalstrategy/docs/cult-00.asp> <accessed 15/2/01>

With regards to the very specific issue of governmental film policy in late '90s Scotland, free market thinking survived the early stages of the transition of political power relatively unscathed. Local filmmakers' criticisms of a lack of financial subsidy and other forms of support for the developing indigenous sector during the dog days of British Conservative rule continued to be made during the salad days of its Labour successor. In sharp contrast to Petrie's optimistic coining of the 'devolved cinema' tag, in 2002 Ellen Raïssa Jackson made a less comforting, but more accurate, assessment when she suggested that "the impact of devolution on the Scottish film industry has so far been negligible".⁴⁴⁴ Given the Labour Executive's enthusiastic adoption of the pre-existing Forsythian political agenda for government support of Scottish cinema, what continued to prevail, in Jackson's neat gloss, was "promotion of Scotland as location [for mobile productions to visit], rather than nation [which indigenous filmmakers both worked from and represented]".⁴⁴⁵

Yet it is also vital to stress, however, that bullish Free Market approaches to national cinema and cultural policy more generally were not the sole preserve of Scotland during the 1990s. They were also markedly prominent within *British* politics and film culture as a whole during this period. Under the first Blair administration, culturally based arguments in defence of public subsidy for British filmmaking were sidelined by a concern to facilitate the economic competitiveness, and eventually, self-sufficiency, of the UK's film production base in international terms. For example, the 1998 industry report *A Bigger Picture* argued that the creation of a self-sufficient British production industry would facilitate a range of economic and cultural benefits which were essentially complementary in nature. The proviso, however, stated that achievement of cultural aims was dependent on the prior meeting of economic targets (jam tomorrow): "achieving our economic goals will lay the foundations of a healthy and diverse film culture...

⁴⁴⁴ Ellen Raïssa Jackson, 'Dislocating the Nation: Political Devolution and Cultural Identity on Stage and Screen', in *Edinburgh Review*, n. 110 (2002), pg. 131.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 126-27. My inserts.

throughout the UK".⁴⁴⁶ Admittedly, this political logic did not the replicate the antagonistic 'culture vs. commerce' binarism of the free market ethos advanced by Michael Forsyth and others. Yet, in some ways, its detrimental effects for culturally-orientated ideations of public subsidy were far more insidious. This was because Blairite free mercantilism attempted the premeditated erasure of *any* sense of conflicting priorities present within distinctive, culturally and economically driven agendas for the development of British film cultures and industries. If Forsythian free mercantilism misrepresented policy options for government support of national film culture in terms of a Manichean choice between 'culture' and 'commerce', at least it was relatively straightforward to discern where government's material and ideological priorities lay. By contrast, Blairite free mercantilism's soothing insistence that no meaningful choice required to be made between cultural and commercial objectives tended to obscure and naturalise the political neglect of the former, by misrepresenting them as wholly isomorphic with the latter. *The Bigger Picture*'s proclamation of an extended consensus around the best way forward for British cinema was in large part a self-serving illusion.⁴⁴⁷

Thus, if Petrie's early '00s designation of Scotland as a 'devolved cinema' was at one level cultural nationalist rhetoric, at another it was an empirically nuanced acknowledgement of the extent to which British metropolitan institutions continued to wield marked influence over Scottish film culture's health and future development. The devolved Scottish government's attitude towards film policy, for example, closely mirrored that of its Westminster patron's. Having spent most of this chapter looking at local institutions, we now turn in conclusion to the British metropolitan institution which wielded most influence over the course of events within late '90s Scottish film culture. That institution is Channel 4.

⁴⁴⁶ Film Policy Review Group, *A Bigger Picture* (London: Department of Media, Culture and Sport, 1998), pg. 10; see also Stephen Pratten & Simon Deakin, 'Competitiveness policy and economic organisation: the case of the British film industry', in *Screen*, Vol. 41. 2 (Summer 2000), pp. 217-237.

⁴⁴⁷ For a detailed overview of the first Blair administration's film policy, see Tom Ryall, 'New Labour and the cinema: culture, politics and economics', in *Journal of Popular British Cinema*, n. 5 (2002), pp. 5-20.

'They expected Trainspotting': Channel 4 and late-'90s Scotland

If the respective stories of late '90s Scottish and British cinemas can be glossed in terms of a newly dominant institutional enthusiasm for a free market agenda of international commercial competitiveness, then nowhere was this phenomenon so clearly visible than at Channel 4. Since its inception in 1982, the broadcaster had proved the most significant and consistent source of public production monies for aspirant British filmmakers. In mid-'90s Scotland, Channel 4 provided majority funding for *Shallow Grave*, and its full funding of *Trainspotting*'s production budget (£1.7m) was then its largest ever single feature investment.⁴⁴⁸ Encouraged by the remarkable domestic and international commercial successes enjoyed by these two films, the broadcaster established itself as the most consistent provider—Lottery funds and the GFF excepted—of major production funding for late '90s Scottish feature work: 9 of the 18 Scottish-produced and themed films released in British cinemas between 1995 and 2000 benefited from a substantial degree of budgetary support from Channel 4.⁴⁴⁹

Shallow Grave and *Trainspotting* influenced Channel 4's late '90s Scottish activities in two ways. Most obviously, they encouraged the broadcaster to invest in Scottish talent and projects regularly and substantially, to a degree not previously seen. Yet those films also helped precipitate a marked change in the rationale traditionally underpinning this support, or indeed, the broadcaster's patronage of British film production generally. If Channel 4's greater financial input into a larger number of Scottish features than ever before proved ostensibly welcome, the conceptual shift in institutional logic that motivated such support in the first place would come to be much more problematic for many of its Scottish beneficiaries. To be specific: post-*Trainspotting*, Channel 4 distanced itself from previously held ideals of supporting (a) British feature production that might realistically achieve a significant degree of self-sufficiency in domestic

⁴⁴⁸ For background on Channel 4's financial involvement with *Trainspotting*, see Angus Finney, *The State of European Cinema: A New Dose of Reality* (London: Cassell, 1996), pp. 175-77; Murray Smith, 'Transnational Trainspotting', in Jane Stokes and Anna Reading (eds.), *The Media in Britain: current debates and developments* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1999), pg. 219.

⁴⁴⁹ The films in question were: *Shallow Grave*, *Trainspotting*, *Carla's Song*, *The Slab Boys*, *My Name Is Joe*, *The Winter Guest*, *The Acid House*, *The Debt Collector*, *Orphans* and *Gregory's 2 Girls*.

exhibition markets, and (b) support of formally and/or politically radical indigenous cinema more generally. Instead, the broadcaster increasingly sought to reinvent FilmFour, its film production and distribution arm, as an international 'mini-studio' along the lines of Miramax, typically producing medium-budget films intended to 'crossover' from art house exhibition circuits into the global commercial mainstream. The dramatic shift in question can be seen in the changing rhetorical priorities of the two men who headed FilmFour during the '90s. In 1996, in the immediate aftermath of *Shallow Grave*'s international box office success, David Aukin argued of the film that,

Its significance lies not so much in its good performance abroad... but in the fact that it was able to recoup its costs within the UK without its success here being powered by an initial success in the USA... The conclusion I draw is that we can make films for ourselves... we need no longer feel overwhelmingly dependent on overseas markets to finance our films.⁴⁵⁰

Yet if this *was* the dominant lesson drawn within Channel 4 in 1996, it was quickly forgotten or repudiated. In 2001, Paul Webster, Aukin's successor at FilmFour since 1998, and the man who had overseen the organisation's reformation as a quasi-independent 'mini-studio', rationalised its activities in the post-*Trainspotting* era by arguing that,

In maturing the [British film] industry what was needed was more of a corporate structure. We worked on the notion of creating a mini-studio, or a microcosm of a studio... There is a bigger plan to make movies globally and build a global business... This is because you can't build a vibrant film business in the UK alone. It's impossible. You can't make any money theatrically or on video, and broadcasters aren't paying

⁴⁵⁰ Quoted in Duncan Petrie (ed.), *Inside Stories: Diaries of British filmmakers at work* (London: BFI, 1996), pg. 3.

what they used to pay... from the point of view of a proper business you have to work internationally.⁴⁵¹

Certainly, the process by which FilmFour's self-image altered rapidly and markedly as the '90s progressed both pre-dates and encompasses *Shallow Grave* and *Trainspotting*; however, these films were both important milestones within this phenomenon and precipitants for its further unfolding and acceleration.

Critics have described and explained Channel 4's aggressive and audacious self-transformation during the '90s, from domestic subsidiser to international speculator, in a number of ways. John Caughie argues that much of the feature work supported by the broadcaster during the '80s and very early '90s was descended from a politically radical tradition of British television drama. This was so in terms of aesthetics, thematics and logistics (the fact that the films in question were primarily disseminated to a national audience through terrestrial television broadcast). By contrast, with regard to the above-noted criteria, Channel 4's most prominent mid-'90s successes—films like *The Crying Game* (Neil Jordan, GB, 1992), *Four Weddings and a Funeral* and *Trainspotting*—"carry their affiliation with television very lightly indeed"⁴⁵², as Caughie sees it. He argues that these films were primarily intended for consumption by an international cinema audience rather than a domestic television one. By the mid '90s, then, Channel 4 had started to measure the success of its film funding activities in terms of international festival acclamation and box office takings, rather than provocative interventions in domestic socio-political debate. For Caughie, a 1980s and early-'90s body of Channel 4-sponsored feature work had been "representative" of the British nation(s), their internal socio-cultural diversity and faultlines. Yet its successor from the mid '90s on typically aimed to fabricate "representation[s]"⁴⁵³ of those nations, a small number of unified images of British national identity reiterated on a regular basis for the benefit of international audiences.

⁴⁵¹ Quoted in John Hill, "'Changing of the guard': Channel 4, FilmFour and film policy", in *Journal of Popular British Cinema*, n. 5 (2002), pp. 58-59.

⁴⁵² John Caughie, *Television Drama: realism, modernism and British culture* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), pg. 183.

⁴⁵³ *Ibid*, pg. 202.

By contrast, John Hill explains developments at Channel 4 with reference to a major early-'90s reformation of the way in which the broadcaster's operational revenues were collected. Channel 4 had been created by the Broadcasting Act of 1981 with a clear public service remit. The Act famously termed this the encouragement of "innovation and experiment in the form and content of programmes".⁴⁵⁴ In order to let Channel 4 do this, it was explicitly protected from market forces, funded through contributions from the advertising revenues of the existing commercial broadcasters that made up the Independent Television Network, rather than being directly responsible for the sale of its own advertising space. This state of affairs lasted until 1993. At that time, the Major government made Channel 4 directly responsible for the sale of its own advertising, and therefore, for meeting its own running costs in the commercial marketplace. Thus, Hill argues, "there were inevitably pressures to make programming both more 'popular' and 'economic'".⁴⁵⁵ Accordingly, from the mid '90s on, FilmFour became much more market-driven in its funding choices, because less materially able to subsidise British feature production on culturally principled, as opposed to commercially calculating, grounds. The seductive power wielded over FilmFour's late-'90s activities by immediately prior international successes like *The Crying Game*, *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, *Shallow Grave* and *Trainspotting* related to those films' apparent transformation of that fact from a matter of necessity into one of virtue.

Many late-'90s filmmakers who benefited from Channel 4's recently enhanced financial support for Scotland identified and complained about the increasingly commercial, internationally focused funding remit discerned by critics like Hill and Caughie. Domestic recipients of FilmFour production funding post-*Trainspotting* often complained of the financier's attempts to dictate assembly line replications of the internationally lucrative aesthetic and generic model of Scottish identity and contemporary culture articulated in that film. As my introduction noted, Peter Mullan, who acted in *Trainspotting*, saw the film's long-term effects on Scottish and British cinemas as

⁴⁵⁴ Quoted in John Hill, 'The Rise and Fall of British Art Cinema', in *Aura*, Vol. IV n. 3 (2000), pg. 20.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid, pg. 28.

equivocal, raising the interests of potential funders in new work, but also creating a hyperbolic vision of the UK's ability to compete consistently within the international commercial mainstream.⁴⁵⁶ John Byrne, another late-'90s beneficiary of Channel 4 funding, concurred. In a case similar to that of *Orphans*, the broadcaster part-funded Byrne's *The Slab Boys*, but subsequently refused to bankroll UK theatrical distribution for the film, outside of an extremely limited Scottish release. Byrne rationalised this by arguing that Channel 4 was less interested in the financial support of a diverse new Scottish cinema and more with the milking of every last drop of revenue from a *Trainspotting*-inspired stereotypical vision of Scotland, and by extension, 'a Scottish film':

[*The Slab Boys*] is not slick or American or violent enough. How do they market something that's not violent or controversial? ... They [FilmFour] expected *Trainspotting*. They should have known – they had the script...⁴⁵⁷

Even Irvine Welsh, a late-'90s recipient of Channel 4 feature funding for *The Acid House*, a self-adaptation of his short fiction, espoused similar worries. He acknowledged the extent to which *Trainspotting* had established a restrictive commercial template of 'a Scottish film' into which funders compelled later filmmakers to fit their work. Indeed, with regards to Channel 4's expectations for *The Acid House*, Welsh proved the literal author of his own misfortune:

I think after *Trainspotting*, which has become a bit of a reference point for just about every British film, that it's very difficult to do something a bit different, a bit less airbrushed, a bit less for the mass market. We wanted the actors to be rougher and to speak

⁴⁵⁶ See reference 56, *passim*.

⁴⁵⁷ Quoted in Beverly D'Silva, 'No sex, no drugs, just rock 'n' roll', in *The Independent*, (28/8/97), *Tabloid* section, pp. 8-9.

roughly. It's very difficult after that, to just do our own wee daft film.⁴⁵⁸

Thus, by the end of the '90s, Channel 4's relationship with Scottish filmmakers had become a paradoxical one. It was one characterised by (relative) financial profligacy but also mutual suspicion and misunderstanding. Once again, an aggressively and ambitiously commercial, internationally orientated institutional remit that seemed attractive in 1995/96 appeared far more questionable by the decade's end. By that time, a widespread local perception existed that Channel 4's ostensibly welcome support for Scottish cinema since 1995 was in some ways harmful. This was because, in the wake of *Shallow Grave* and *Trainspotting*, Channel 4's local patronage became increasingly predicated on a reductive, even avaricious metropolitan prescription of what did and did not constitute a properly 'Scottish' feature. The irony is that once it finally, belatedly arrived, the sustained material support Scottish filmmakers had looked to Channel 4 for since the early '80s was seen by many as "the tyranny of television"⁴⁵⁹. The broadcaster curtailed Scottish filmmakers' room for creative expression and innovation in an unfeasible search for competitiveness at the international box office.

In July 2002, Channel 4 announced the closure of the expanded, semi-autonomous FilmFour mini-studio it had established in 1998 in order to integrate and expand to an international scale the broadcaster's film production, distribution and sales activities. This decision was made in light of operational losses of £8.4m sustained by FilmFour between 2000 and 2001, as the attempt to establish it as an internationally successful 'mini-studio' along the lines of Miramax foundered in the wake of box office disappointments such as *Charlotte Gray*.⁴⁶⁰ Yet despite the undoubted material centrality of Channel 4 as a major commissioner of Scottish feature work post-*Trainspotting*, so ambiguous had the broadcaster's influence over local cultural and creative issues become, that the Chief Executive of Scottish Screen could react with something approaching equanimity:

⁴⁵⁸ Quoted in Laura Macdonald, '100% Uncut: Irvine Welsh on *The Acid House*', @ http://www.indiewire.com/people/int_Welsh_Irvine_990804.html <accessed 20/7/02>

⁴⁵⁹ Wardell, op. cit., pg. 12.

⁴⁶⁰ See Andrew Pulver, 'End of an Era', in *The Guardian*, (12/7/02), G2 Section, pp. 2-4.

A huge blow to the UK industry but for Scotland the jury must still be out. Scottish film producers' relationship with Channel 4/FilmFour was built on low budget productions... the sort of work FilmFour had moved away from in a quest for international hits. Perhaps our companies will in the future be able to connect more with that original low budget framework which Channel 4 seems keen to re-establish.⁴⁶¹

The heady mercantile aspiration that underwrote Channel 4's late '90s presence in Scotland had, like other central institutional agendas of the period, failed to develop a sustainable long-term programme for local industrial sustainability or cultural diversity, let alone their mutually reinforcing progress.

Conclusion

The free mercantile collective institutional agenda which had dominated late-'90s Scottish film culture continued to exist into the early '00s, but in a chastened and increasingly contested form. In 2002, Steve McIntyre conceded that, "too often in the past we have adopted goals and strategies without adequate analysis of their importance to the development of the Scottish film industry".⁴⁶² This view certainly accords with the institutional history of Scottish cinema in the late '90s narrated in this chapter. Yet McIntyre continued to argue that Scottish Screen needed to adhere to culturally 'neutral' criteria when dispensing its available production funds to domestic applicants:

Whether these are films which illuminate Scottish society, which tell Scottish stories, tackle Scottish issues, or reflect Scotland

⁴⁶¹ Steve McIntyre, 'firstcut', in *roughcuts*, (Aug 2002), pg. 1.

⁴⁶² Quoted in Christine Winford, 'A New Era for Scottish Screen: Interview with Steve McIntyre', in *Vertigo*, Vol. 2. 2 (Spring 2002), pg. 17.

back to itself is down to the passions and aspirations of filmmakers themselves.⁴⁶³

McIntyre acknowledged that Scottish Screen was both “a cultural and industrial body” in terms of the remit it discharged within local film culture. Yet this rhetorical bifurcation was apparently belied by the continuing presence of the dominant institutional logic of the late '90s, in that ‘culture’ and ‘commerce’ still appeared to be conceived—at least at the level of public pronouncement—as compartmentalised entities. Despite the setbacks and controversies associated with it during the late '90s, a lop-sided sequential argument that economic developmental initiatives always and entirely formed the “*bona fide* industrial basis”⁴⁶⁴ for the emergence of a culturally engaged and formally diverse Scottish cinema persisted into a new decade.

The institutional overview provided by this chapter diverges from McIntyre’s in many ways nuanced and sympathetic analysis of Scottish cinema’s prospects after the 1990s. This is because the story of that decade suggests that the interaction between ‘industrial’ and ‘cultural’ initiatives within a marginal film culture cannot be adequately understood in terms of a clearly sequential evolutionary process, ‘commerce’ *then* ‘culture’. More appropriate and accurate, perhaps, is the local institutional analysis provided by Robin Macpherson, a Scottish Screen Development Executive until 2002. In 2003, he complained that the policy actions and utterances of contemporary Scottish and British film institutions had become predominantly structured by “a fairly deep-seated belief that we are in a post-statist world in which there is relatively equal access to the means of expression”.⁴⁶⁵ Within such logic, the job of institutions is to intervene in the economic and industrial questions facing an emergent national cinema, but to wash their hands of aesthetically, culturally and politically contentious and prescriptive counterparts.

⁴⁶³ Ibid, pg. 16.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid, pg. 17.

⁴⁶⁵ Robin Macpherson, ‘Rewriting the script on film development’, in *Vertigo*, Vol. 2. 4 (Spring 2003), pg. 10.

It was just this institutional view which was often found wanting within late '90s Scotland, although to be fair, it was also not wholly without success. A range of relevant Scottish and British institutions either fostered or provided a more equitable and substantive degree of local access to the financial and infrastructural means of film production than previously experienced in Scotland. The bottom line remains that domestic feature work was produced with greater frequency and consistency in the late '90s than ever before. Yet despite this, ostensibly emancipated local filmmakers often felt increasingly circumscribed in creative and national cultural terms. The perception was that a very limited number of preferred kinds of feature work from and/or based in Scotland were bankrolled, and therefore legitimated, during this period.

While the present work is indebted to the institutional turn in Scottish cinema studies spearheaded by Duncan Petrie, it diverges from the conclusions reached in his analysis of the late '90s. The praise Petrie accords the "increasingly professional"⁴⁶⁶ way in which local institutions conceived and tackled the central material questions facing Scottish film culture during this period is an overly sanitised judgement. It replicates aspects of the institutional agendas it documents as much as it interrogates these. As this chapter indicates, the dominant late '90s rhetoric of 'professionalisation' proved questionable in several regards. Firstly, it routinely misrepresented overtly cultural approaches to the consolidation of the Scottish audiovisual industries as 'irrational' (or 'unprofessional'). Secondly, it misrepresented itself as a self-sufficient developmental agenda for the future development and health of those industries. Hence, the contemporarily pervasive late-'90s axiom that culturally orientated initiatives could be deferred today, because a properly consolidated Scottish film industry would automatically attend to them tomorrow. Thirdly—and perhaps most tellingly—the late-'90s 'professional' institutional agenda was a significantly qualified success with reference to the terms it set for itself. The funding activities of the Scottish Lottery Panel, the Caledonian adventures of Channel 4, the dream of a Scottish studio: all these failed to replicate the fleeting international commercial success of 1995/96. By the decade's end, moreover, it was clear that they hadn't established an industrially *and* culturally convincing blueprint for

⁴⁶⁶ Petrie, *Screening...*, op. cit., pg. 222.

Scottish cinema's long-term development, either. By 2001, the 'Scottish-American' creative and institutional agendas which dominated the 1990s had certainly established the preconditions for a sustainable Scottish cinema. Yet their shelf-life as the most productive strategies to consolidate such gains beyond that decade was largely exhausted. This fact becomes clearer once we turn to detailed consideration of the films produced within Scotland at the twentieth century's close.

Chapter 4

'It's been great working with you': Scottish cinema, 1995 - 2001

Introduction: from Oscar to au revoir

Mid-1996: a Scottish filmmaker's brief moment in the sun comes to an abrupt end. In the immediate aftermath of his already-noted 1995 Best Short Film Oscar for *Franz Kafka's It's A Wonderful Life*, Peter Capaldi is courted by a number of American studios to write and/or direct a feature project. Some six years later, Capaldi indicated something of the excitement and inflated ambition that period held for him: "after the Oscar... there had been a lot of American interest in me... I wrote script after script, with each project getting bigger and bigger".⁴⁶⁷ Yet ultimately, none of these projects, nor the hopes attached to them, materialised: "all of them collapsed".⁴⁶⁸ As this chapter will show, Capaldi's individual career trajectory - notable early achievement/subsequent inflated expectation/eventual disappointment - is one that can be extrapolated to gloss the narrative of late '90s Scottish cinema as a whole.

Most painfully, between April 1995 and January 1996, Capaldi embarked on serial redrafts of a self-written feature project, *Moon Man*, at the behest of the American 'mini-major' studio Miramax. This frustrating and ultimately abortive process was memorialised in a diary later published by the British Film Institute.⁴⁶⁹ Capaldi's encounter with Miramax culminated in an unwelcome reminder of the stark imbalance of power which characterised the working relationship between a filmmaker hailing from a traditionally marginal film culture and powerful financiers operating at the heart of the world's most historically powerful:

Tribeca Building. Bob [Weinstein]'s office... he looks at me
and says... 'As distributors, which is what we're known as, we

⁴⁶⁷ Quoted in David Belcher, 'I've got him under my skin: Interview with Peter Capaldi', in *The Herald*, (9/11/01), pg. 20.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁹ See Peter Capaldi, 'The Writer', in Duncan Petrie (ed.), *Inside Stories: diaries of British filmmakers at work* (London: BFI, 1996), pp. 76-85.

don't know how to sell this... All the doubts I had originally about the script are still there. The problems with the material have not been resolved... But I gotta tell you, you're one of the family here. And we love you. We love what you do. It's been great working with you'.⁴⁷⁰

Understandably chastened, Capaldi nevertheless attempted to turn personal misfortune to creative advantage. *Strictly Sinatra*, the Scottish-American feature the director *did* eventually succeed in making, was presented by the filmmaker as a displaced fictional rumination on wider issues raised by real-life professional trauma, "really my reaction to all the stuff that went on in America... [something] that was about an area that I understood".⁴⁷¹

To clarify: *Strictly Sinatra* reifies its creator's personal disappointment at the hands of the American film industry into an allegorical 'understanding' of an endemically marginalised, deficient and self-loathing Scottish (film) culture. This culture is depicted as one haunted by its inability to mimic the achievements of its significant transatlantic Other, let alone produce a distinctive, self-sufficient local counterpart. Key here is *Strictly Sinatra*'s central protagonist, Tony Coccozza, a mediocre Glaswegian nightclub crooner. Tony and his nightly act, choices from the Great American Songbook made famous by Sinatra, but scored here for lone Casio keyboard, personify a locally representative, technically underwhelming, hopelessly naïve attempt to emulate the historic achievements of American popular culture. Pleased by his set, a coterie of Glaswegian gangsters takes him under its wing. Tony is attracted to the criminals in question because they seem to him to have re-created 1960s Las Vegas in miniature on Scotland's West Coast, financing a glamorous, or perhaps more accurately, gaudy, lifestyle through their laundering of drug money through ostensibly legitimate casino venues. However, even the Glasgow mob's financial muscle and threats of violence cannot propel him to local stardom within local show business circles; he is soon reduced

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid, pg. 84.

⁴⁷¹ Quoted in Andy Dougan, 'My Oscar curse', in *Glasgow Evening Times*, (15/10/01), pg. 11.

to working as a drugs mule. Belatedly rediscovering his self-respect in an unlikely denouement, Tony realises the moral and creative bankruptcy inherent in both the local mafia's creation of a Scottish 'Little Vegas' and his privileged role as its preferred house act. He sabotages a drugs deal, gives a final barnstorming performance of 'My Way' at the gangsters' nightclub of choice, and then escapes to New York with his girlfriend in order to start a new life.

Peter Capaldi and his writing/directing career are very much marginal subjects within the existing body of Scottish cinema literature. However, the industrial and critical fortunes of this filmmaker and his films proved acutely representative of the dominant ways in which Scottish film culture perceived itself at the beginning and the end of the 1990s, respectively. As noted in the introduction to chapter 3, *Soft Top Hard Shoulder* and *Franz Kafka's It's A Wonderful Life* seemed emblematic of an internationally visible, indigenous Scottish cinema's rise during the early '90s. They also reflected the nature of the creative and industrial strategies driving that ascension: enterprising and markedly self-aware local appropriations of a range of working practices associated with American cinema past and present. However, by the start of the '00s, many worried that Scottish cinema's brief moment as "the flavor of the zeitgeist"⁴⁷² had evaporated. Despite the excitement and inflated hopes associated with the high watermark of 1995/96, little of long-lasting film cultural or industrial worth had actually been achieved because of it. *Strictly Sinatra's* early '00s diagnosis of Scottish culture's craven prostration before its unconcerned American superior is entirely representative of wider contemporary perspectives and debates. For example, one journalistic commentator in 2001 asked his readership to "imagine if we made—using public money—whisky so bad the Americans wouldn't drink it"⁴⁷³, and then argued that this was precisely what *had* happened in recent years within Scotland's 'failed' film industry.

⁴⁷² Harlan Kennedy, 'Kiltspotting: Highland Reels', in *Film Comment*, Vol. 32. 4 (Jul/Aug 1996), pg. 29.

⁴⁷³ George Kerevan, 'Why are we ploughing so much cash into movie flops?', *The Scotsman*, (10/5/01), pg. 5. It should be noted, however, that this writer's free market political views quite possibly make him hostile to the idea of public subsidy for the Arts in general.

Further fuelling such representatively pessimistic contemporary views, the gloom pervading *Strictly Sinatra*'s depiction of crippled Scottish film and national cultures was underscored by the movie's disastrous box office performance, not to mention the underwhelming longer term track record of its major local financier. Budgeted at the relatively high figure (for the contemporary UK industry) of £4m, *Strictly Sinatra* grossed somewhere between a mere £16-18 000 in British cinemas.⁴⁷⁴ Although benefiting from minority funding by US producer The Samuel Goldwyn Co., *Strictly Sinatra* was mostly financed by DNA Films, one of three production franchises set up by the incoming UK Labour government in 1997 to invest the majority of the funds directed to support British film production from National Lottery receipts. As Phil Wickham notes, the ambitious rationale behind the Lottery Franchises was that "these conglomerates would come to resemble mini-studios, working towards that all-important critical mass"⁴⁷⁵ of well developed indigenous feature product. This would allow the British industry to carve out consistently profitable niches for itself within both domestic and international theatrical markets. With this aim in mind, it seemed encouraging that DNA was headed by the two British producers who had most notably achieved just such success on an occasional basis during the mid '90s, Duncan Kenworthy—*Four Weddings and a Funeral*—and Andrew Macdonald —*Trainspotting*.⁴⁷⁶ Yet DNA's performance in this regard was wholly underwhelming. Granted £29m of Lottery monies to finance a slate of 16 British features over a 6 year period, some £15m of this remained unspent by November 2003. At that point in time, DNA announced that it was going into partnership with the Rupert Murdoch-owned Hollywood studio Fox Searchlight. This prompted bitter complaints that public funding which "should long ago have been invested in British film production" was being "use[d]... as a dowry"⁴⁷⁷ to court just the kind of overseas private

⁴⁷⁴ See Brian Pendreigh, 'Local heroes missing out on the big picture', in *Scotland on Sunday*, (1/12/02), pg. 9.

⁴⁷⁵ Phil Wickham, *Producing The Goods? UK Film Production Since 1991: An Information Briefing* (London: BFI, 2003), pg. 14.

⁴⁷⁶ Robert Murphy, 'Another false dawn? The Film Consortium and the franchise scheme', in *Journal of Popular British Cinema*, n. 5 (2002), pg. 31.

⁴⁷⁷ Geoffrey Macnab, 'Choose cash', in *The Guardian*, (13/11/03), @ <http://film.guardian.co.uk/print/0,3858,4796046-3181,00.html> <accessed 29/12/05>

interests the Lottery Franchises were supposed to help British filmmakers compete more effectively against.

DNA's perceived under-production, despite benefiting from Lottery financing, was not the only contentious aspect of the organisation's (in)activities. The commercial and critical performance of the relatively few indigenous features which the franchise *did* manage to release into British cinemas between 1997 and 2003 was an equally vexed concern. Perhaps due to Macdonald's local roots, Scottish projects and creative personnel were disproportionately prominent within this small body of films. Yet this fact ultimately meant that DNA's apparent late '90s failure seemed to imply that Scottish cinema *per se* was as unsustainable and unsuccessful an entity as the ailing Lottery Franchise scheme. As already noted, *Strictly Sinatra* proved to be a domestic box office disaster; *The Final Curtain*, a black comedy written by Macdonald's *Shallow Grave* and *Trainspotting* collaborator John Hodge, was never deemed satisfactory enough to be put into theatrical distribution; *Beautiful Creatures*, a £4m feature which took just over £0.2m at the box office⁴⁷⁸, attracted such an acute degree of contemporary critical opprobrium that Julian Petley sees it as "the best example to date of a [British] film which appears to have been condemned largely on account of its public funding [through the Lottery Franchise scheme]".⁴⁷⁹ By 2001, Andrew Macdonald, acclaimed by many during the mid-'90s as the 'saviour' of Scottish and British cinemas, complained that the concerted hostility of the British press towards DNA's activities were prompting him to consider – rather like the hero of *Strictly Sinatra* – escaping to America. Macdonald was tempted to leave behind a native film culture he presented as crippled by its own self-hatred: "it's an irony, but for small films requiring specialist handling, America is easier. The British market is currently the most difficult in the world".⁴⁸⁰

Developments such as these indicate the extent to which 1990s Scottish cinema was beset by a structuring irony. While this ten year period witnessed unprecedented local

⁴⁷⁸ Wickham, op. cit., pg. 25.

⁴⁷⁹ Julian Petley, 'From Brit-flicks to shit-flicks: The cost of public subsidy', in *Journal of Popular British Cinema*, n. 5 (2002), pg. 48. My inserts.

⁴⁸⁰ Quoted in Matt Bendoris, 'The truth about MacHollywood', in *The Sun*, (30/3/01), n. pg. ref. (National Library of Scotland electronic press archive).

industrial advances and critical/commercial successes, the era ended on a note of perceived industrial and creative stagnation, even reverse. In 1996, Mark Renton's confident assertion to international audiences at the end of *Trainspotting* that he was intent upon 'becoming more like you' crystallised the dominant mood of a confident Scottish cinema which sought to hybridise local and transatlantic creative traditions and identities. In 2001, Tony Cocozza's self-regarding protestation that he 'did it my way' stood in ironic counterpoint to his almost total internalisation of an essentialised American national *mythos*, a local cultural condition which *Strictly Sinatra* simultaneously shared and diagnosed as nationally characteristic. This begs the question of how criticism goes about explaining such rapid and extreme changes in commercial, critical and industrial fortunes. It also needs to understand the reasons behind the wildly fluctuating degrees of self-confidence inherent in Scottish cinema's representations of national culture and identity the longer the 1990s wore on. Martin McLoone proffers one potentially productive answer when he identifies a central problem facing marginal Anglophone cinemas like those of Scotland and Ireland. For McLoone, the challenge in question is that of "trying to work through difference critically – trying to live with Hollywood rather than trying to mimic it".⁴⁸¹ 1990s Scottish cinema's structuring irony is explicable through the fact that while 'critical working through of difference' with regards to the industrial power and locally felt cultural authority of American cinema formed the keynote of the early '90s, naïve 'mimicry' dominated the later part of the decade.

To develop and illustrate this contention at length, this chapter begins by discussing two Scottish films released in the immediate aftermath of the '90s, *Late Night Shopping* and *Strictly Sinatra*. These particular films illustrate the extent to which '90s Scottish cinema typically failed to rise to the challenge of 'working through difference critically' after the boom year of 1995/96. This was despite the fact that – as chapter 3 illustrated – it was just such pre-'95 'critical' creative and institutional work which had (albeit with a degree of good fortune) engineered the conditions necessary for that boom in the first place. *Late Night Shopping* and *Strictly Sinatra* represent respectively the continuation of the

⁴⁸¹ Martin McLoone, *Irish Film: The Emergence of a Contemporary Cinema* (London: BFI, 2000), pg. 200.

'Scottish Independent' and 'Scottish Classical' strands firmly established by *Shallow Grave* and *Rob Roy*. Yet the later films are consumed by the idea of 'mimicking' American cinematic precedents rather than critically adapting them, as was the case with the earlier movies. As we shall see, *Late Night Shopping* falls prey to a naïve belief that Scottish cinema and national cultures' 'difference' from their American counterparts can (indeed, *should*) be wished out of existence by an absolute local counterfeiting of various strands of US Independent Cinema. On the other hand, the nihilistic quality to *Strictly Sinatra*'s representation of national identity can be located in the film's self-defeating, *a priori* assumption that 'mimicry' constitutes the only possible kind of relationship Scottish film and national cultures could strike up with their American counterparts. In different ways, these two films constitute supporting evidence for a despairing and ever more vocal contemporary perspective that British cinema at the start of the twenty-first century was one in which "American cultural and economic dominance is accepted as a fact of life".⁴⁸² Indeed, this chapter concludes with discussion of *Gregory's 2 Girls*, a film which offers just such an analysis of Scottish *national*, let alone film, culture at the very end of the '90s.

Anywhere but here (1): Late Night Shopping and the late-'90s Scottish Independent film

Late Night Shopping's narrative centres around four underachieving but nonetheless glamorous twentysomethings living in an unspecified British city. Sean, Vincent, Lenny and Jody are trapped in low wage, un- or semi-skilled night shift jobs: hospital porter, supermarket shelf stacker, call centre operator, and microelectronics assembly line worker respectively. The quartet spends its nocturnal breaks and leisure time idly conversing in an all-night coffee bar. However, this hardly salves their respective states of acute isolation and alienation. Sean has not seen his girlfriend, Madeline, for weeks, despite the fact that they ostensibly cohabit, and is unclear whether or not his relationship

⁴⁸² Nick James, 'They Think It's All Over: British Cinema's US Surrender', in Robert Murphy (ed.), *The British Cinema Book*, 2nd Edn. (London: BFI, 2001), pg. 301.

is over; Vincent is a compulsive gigolo, breaking all contact with a succession of lovers after sleeping with them for a third time; Lenny has spent years as a professional writer of pornographic fiction, and his sexual maturation has been so compromised that he cannot make romantic advances towards any woman he is attracted to; Jody is fired from her assembly line job, as her habitual demeanour inadvertently casts a pall over the spirits of her fellow downtrodden workers. The film's narrative and thematic progression is dependent upon the four main characters' painful, but ultimately successful, attempts to breach their individual and collective states of anomie and immaturity. Vince knowingly sleeps with Madeline, but confesses to Sean and determines to mend his ways; Sean has also been unfaithful, but ultimately salvages his relationship with Madeline; Lenny overcomes his inhibitions and asks a colleague on a date; Jody confesses her loneliness and need for friendship to the three men. These various plot strands are tied up during a climactic daytrip to an anonymous seaside resort. This represents a literal and symbolic journey from night into day: Sean and Madeline are reunited; the four central characters re-establish their relationships with each other on the basis of genuine emotional commitment.

As already noted above, *Late Night Shopping* was a local film clearly positioned within the 'Scottish Independent' template established by *Shallow Grave* and *Trainspotting*. Like better-known late-'90s filmmakers such as Peter Mullan and Lynne Ramsay, *Late Night Shopping*'s writer (Jack Lothian) and director (Saul Metzstein) graduated to their feature debut through publicly funded short film schemes. The two first collaborated on *Santa Claws* (Saul Metzstein, GB, 1997), a short funded through the Prime Cuts initiative.⁴⁸³ Discussing *Late Night Shopping* in interview around the time of its UK theatrical release, Metzstein acknowledged that, "the film that was very important to me was *Shallow Grave*. It is plush low budget. You can do it by keeping the action contained, keeping it all on a small scale".⁴⁸⁴ Elsewhere, Metzstein agreed that *Late Night Shopping* (like his avatar *Shallow Grave*) was "certainly more influenced by American

⁴⁸³ See Duncan Petrie, *Screening Scotland* (London: BFI, 2000), pg. 229.

⁴⁸⁴ Quoted in Juliette Garside, 'Filmmaker aims to find the key to commercial success', in *The Sunday Herald*, (7/1/01), pg. 7.

independent cinema that anything else”⁴⁸⁵, because he saw it as “belong[ing] to a mostly American tradition of dialogue-heavy, youth-orientated films”.⁴⁸⁶ Key progenitors variously remarked on by the makers or critics of *Late Night Shopping* in this regard included, for example, *American Graffiti* (George Lucas, USA, 1973), *Diner* (Barry Levinson, USA, 1982) and *The Breakfast Club* (John Hughes, USA, 1984).⁴⁸⁷ Most specifically of all, *Late Night Shopping* was correctly identified by some as “a British Slacker movie”⁴⁸⁸, heavily indebted to the example of US independent writer/directors such as Kevin Smith - *Clerks* (USA, 1994), *Mallrats* (USA, 1995) - and Richard Linklater - *Slacker* (USA, 1991), *Dazed and Confused* (USA, 1993). The Slacker cycle’s distinguishing features include: an apolitical emphasis on (usually masculine) contemporary youth subcultures; confined use of narrative locations with a frequent preference for interior, not exterior, shooting; the privileging of extensive and ornate showpieces of comedic dialogue; disproportionate attention paid to the quality and content of such scripted material, as opposed to a range of other potential marketing tools (star casting, visual pyrotechnics, sensationalist narrative content) as the selling point for potential financiers, and subsequently, theatrical audiences. Such characteristics are, of course, largely motivated by the fact that the ‘slacker’ sub-genre, perhaps even more so than many of the other contemporary filmmaking practices glossed by the ‘American Independent’ label, has been a mode of feature production which has typically proceeded under extreme budgetary constraint. *Late Night Shopping*’s constrained budget (relatively speaking) consisted of contributions of £0.9m jointly from FilmFour and its German distribution partner Senator Films, £0.5m from the Scottish Screen-administered National Lottery Fund and £0.1m from the Glasgow Film Office, covering final production costs in the region of £1.5m.⁴⁸⁹

In a number of regards, then, *Late Night Shopping* appeared to indicate a deliberate local retreat from the significantly larger, more speculative budget levels associated with late-’90s Scottish Lottery projects, and a return to the ‘plush low budget’ aesthetic and

⁴⁸⁵ Quoted in Allan Hunter, ‘Supermarket Sweet’, in *Scotland on Sunday*, (4/2/01), pg. 4.

⁴⁸⁶ Saul Metzstein, ‘Grit and Polish’, in *Sight & Sound*, Vol. 11.5 (May 2001), pp. 13.

⁴⁸⁷ See, for example, Hannah McGill, ‘Could this be the kiss of life?’, in *The Herald*, (16/6/01), pg. 18.

⁴⁸⁸ Andy Richards, ‘Review: *Late Night Shopping*’, in *Sight & Sound*, Vol. 11. 6 (Jun 2001), pg. 47.

⁴⁸⁹ See Garside, op. cit.

industrial strategy represented by *Shallow Grave* and *Trainspotting*. Key stylistic and narrative elements of this film seemed equally indebted to both *Shallow Grave/Trainspotting* and the American Independent film culture which Macdonald, Boyle and Hodge had borrowed heavily from. Relevant here, for example, were the predominance of a single, studio-constructed interior narrative setting (the all night diner), reliance on dialogue-heavy scene structure, foregrounding of young masculine sub-cultural identities. For then-Scottish Screen Chief Executive John Archer, the idea of a conscious reconnection with some of the creative and commercial strategies which had assumed local prominence in 1995/96, “low budget features with stories that capture what it means to be living now”, was where “real scope for success”⁴⁹⁰ lay for the Scottish industry in mid-2001.

Yet while *Late Night Shopping* represented a premeditated local creative and institutional attempt to reconnect with the commercially and industrially successful ‘Scottish Independent’ model of the early ’90s, it was ultimately an unsuccessful one. This was so commercially: *Late Night Shopping* grossed a mere £100 040 at the UK box office.⁴⁹¹ Yet it was also the case both critically and culturally. Sporadic reviewers’ praise for the film as a technically well-executed commercial proposition jostled with a marked degree of hostility towards the deracination the film’s obvious eye on the mainstream box office was seen to entail, setting a culturally anonymous (but therefore universally legible) narrative in “a Glasgow apparently empty of Glaswegians”⁴⁹², the city reduced to a functional backdrop, “an unidentified anytown, although serviced by Strathclyde trains”.⁴⁹³

The central problem was that the creative personnel and institutions behind *Late Night Shopping* misapprehended ‘*Shallow Grave/Trainspotting*’ as a stable, one-dimensionally commercial and transatlantic developmental blueprint for Scottish cinema. This was symbolic of post-’96 developments with Scottish cinema more generally. Creative and

⁴⁹⁰ John Archer, ‘Harder they come’, in *roughcuts*, (May 2001), pg. 1.

⁴⁹¹ See Wickham, op. cit., pg. 40.

⁴⁹² Anthony Quinn, ‘Review: *Late Night Shopping*’, in *The Independent*, (22/6/01), *Features* section, pg.

10.

⁴⁹³ Anon, ‘After-hours pals shake off those old stereotypes’, in *The Daily Record*, (22/6/01), pg. 64.

institutional personnel overlooked the dynamic hybridisation of commercial and cultural considerations, local and American cultural traditions and identities, engineered by early-'90s Scottish Independent films. *Late Night Shopping*'s deferential relationship to key works of the early decade is one overwhelmingly aware of certain stylistic lessons—commercially preferred aesthetic, narrative and generic forms—but simultaneously ignorant of their culturally substantive counterparts. The film's representative late-'90s over-simplification of creative and industrial strategies associated with the earlier part of the decade can be seen in three central creative aspects of the *Shallow Grave/Trainspotting* model which it consciously tries to replicate, but ends up bowdlerising. These are: apparent cultural anonymity ("this could be any city"), ideas of commercially competitive and cost-effective local screenwriting practice and the desire to coin an internationally marketable 'Scottish' visual aesthetic.

Late Night Shopping and anonymity: 'could this be any city'?

One of the most complex and dynamic aspects of the infant 'Scottish Independent' cinema represented by *Shallow Grave* and *Trainspotting* was that such films correctly saw Scottish cinema's historical marginality as both an industrial *and* cultural challenge. Accordingly, it had to be negotiated through the development of local filmmaking practices which were at once creatively and entrepreneurially innovative in character. Thus, while these films enthusiastically adopted internationally legible generic, aesthetic and narrative modes associated with contemporary American cinema, they also take as a central narrative theme, the dubious feasibility and/or desirability of completely transcending local identity and cultural location. The question of whether it is 'shite being Scottish', and if so, what to do about this, resonates slyly throughout *Shallow Grave* and *Trainspotting*. The dialectic between cultural belonging and cosmopolitan alienation is explored in these texts through its direct association with (and personification through) the films' protagonists (Alex, David, Juliet, Renton). However, the Scottish Independent films which followed in the wake of *Trainspotting* generally ignored this central characteristic of the local model it ostensibly took as its lodestar. Representatively, for

Late Night Shopping screenwriter Jack Lothian, the enduring lesson offered to later Scottish filmmakers by *Shallow Grave* involved the commercially utilitarian need “for Scottish films to lose a lot of their regionality”⁴⁹⁴ pure and simple. He dismissed the idea that creative exploration, subversion and strategic utilisation of ‘regionality’ constituted an unavoidable, but potentially productive, creative challenge for Scottish filmmakers: “in Britain more than anywhere else, people are obsessed with how regional a film is. Who cares?”⁴⁹⁵ Similarly, for Saul Metzstein, the potential for *Late Night Shopping* to be an identifiably ‘local’ film, given the shared provenance of much of its creative talent and funding, could not be conceived of as anything other than a commercial problem: “if you set a film in Glasgow, people come to it with so many assumptions and prejudices which wouldn’t fit into a film like this”.⁴⁹⁶ Narrative sequences are typically introduced by establishing shots which quite consciously do not establish anything. Generic long shots of office buildings at night and location shots of the facades of central narrative settings (the coffee bar, the supermarket Vince works in) so tightly framed as to abstract them from the wider physical and social spaces within which they are located predominate. In *Late Night Shopping*, the central narrative premise of the main characters’ crepuscular working lives cleverly rationalises and naturalises the extraordinary lengths which the film goes to neither specify nor explore its setting: “it’s not actually set anywhere, which was a deliberate move”.⁴⁹⁷ After all, in the dark, and with nearly everyone else asleep, the distinctive cultural identity of any metropolis is at its most attenuated.

Despite an apparent failure to recognise this central departure from the mid-’90s creative/industrial Scottish cinematic model it publicly fetishised, the ‘anti-regional’ Scottish filmmaking agenda proposed by the makers of *Late Night Shopping* found many creative and institutional echoes during the late decade. *Shallow Grave* and *Trainspotting* had played the locally specific and internationally generic against each other in ironic counterpoint. The dominant late-’90s view was very different. The more a Scottish Independent movie could qualify (or preferably, erase) markers of local specificity in

⁴⁹⁴ Quoted in the author’s *Scotch Reels: Scotland in Cinema pt. 2*, tx. BBC Radio Scotland (9/7/02).

⁴⁹⁵ Quoted in McGill, op. cit.

⁴⁹⁶ Quoted in Rory Ford, ‘Great Scots Movies II’, in *Edinburgh Evening News*, (21/6/01), pg. 8

⁴⁹⁷ Jack Lothian quoted in *Scotch Reels*, tx. 9/7/02, op. cit.

narrative content, the closer it could come to a functional replication of a range of American filmmaking practices and traditions, the better. Symptomatically, for the Scottish industry newsletter *roughcuts*, *Late Night Shopping* was “bound to travel and do well”⁴⁹⁸ because the film’s narrative and central themes were almost entirely “non-site specific”.⁴⁹⁹ Elsewhere, Paul McGuigan, director of the Scottish Independent movie *The Acid House*, spoke of his desire “to make Edinburgh look like South LA, unlike the dull way it usually is”.⁵⁰⁰ Scriptwriter Irvine Welsh concurred, arguing that “a lot of the things that go on in the black housing projects are the same as what goes on in the schemes in Scotland”.⁵⁰¹ Analogously, writer/director Simon Donald explained how important it was for him that *The Life of Stuff*’s abundance of narcotic consumption and random *grand guignol* violence avoided “root[ing] our location in the Nineties in a precise city of Scotland”.⁵⁰² Accordingly the film was set (and shot on location) in a derelict warehouse on abandoned ground; this ‘found set’ serves as a surreal criminal den-cum-nightclub which the characters never leave. Thus, despite a number of late-’90s Scottish Independent filmmakers’ public deference to *Shallow Grave* and *Trainspotting*, their films typically offered a domestic audience opportunities for local recognition which were much more constrained and less ironically inflected than those created by that canonical diptych. For example, unlike *Shallow Grave* (the charity ceildh) or *Trainspotting* (the landscape of mountain and flood that makes one ‘proud to be Scottish’), *Late Night Shopping* makes no attempt to foreground narrative locations endowed with any form of wider national cultural or ideological resonance.

⁴⁹⁸ Anon, ‘*Late Night Shopping* & clapping, cheering & whistling!’, in *roughcuts*, (Jul 2001), pg. 1.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁰ Quoted in *The Acid House Press Pack*, pg. 20 (BFI Reading Room microfiche).

⁵⁰¹ Quoted in Simon Davis, ‘Raveheart: interview with Irvine Welsh’, in *Uncut*, n. 20 (Jun 1999), pg. 41.

⁵⁰² Quoted in Andrew. O. Thompson, ‘A cosmopolitan celebration of cinema’, in *American Cinematographer*, Vol. 78 n. 12 (Dec 1997), pg. 116.

Late Night Shopping and script: 'the rest is just details'

As already noted, *Late Night Shopping* was a studiedly (and representatively) 'anonymous' late-'90s/early-'00s Scottish film, particularly indebted to the example its creators believed had been set by *Shallow Grave*. The latter film was notable for its use of an American-influenced model of script structure which simultaneously rendered it commercially attractive and drew attention to the highly constructed character of its representation of local culture and identity. By contrast, *Late Night Shopping*'s approach to script was one in which commercial concerns had achieved a one-sided dominance over representational equivalents. This film sought to naturalise, rather than ironise, its markedly anonymous character. In this way, it reflects the more general late-'90s misinterpretation and simplistic application—discussed in the previous chapter—of *Shallow Grave*, *Rob Roy* and *Trainspotting*'s lessons about the significance of script for a marginal film culture.

In fact, *Late Night Shopping* does claim a very specific, etiolated form of local engagement, but only in order to justify the wider systematic evacuation of specific social or national detail from its narrative. The unskilled night jobs and unsocial working hours oppressing the film's main protagonists are portrayed as symptomatic of a post-industrial, globalised service economy. Late capitalism debars people from extended personal or formal political contact with friends, colleagues, or in Sean's case, even lovers. As Saul Metzstein put it, "the characters in the film... have no concept of politics. They are totally in a vacuum, and I think that's very modern".⁵⁰³ One of the central quartet, Jake, crystallises this purported condition of 'modernity' in a line of dialogue which highlights just how conveniently that putative state gels with the international commercial aspirations of both *Late Night Shopping* and the contemporary Scottish film culture from which the film emanated: "we're friends, the rest is just details". Disagreeing with this diagnosis, Jody challenges Lenny and Vincent to answer correctly three questions about her: occupation, surname and favourite colour. They get only the latter right ("green").

⁵⁰³ Quoted in Wendy Ide, 'The thrill of the purchase', in *The Sunday Herald*, (17/1/01), *Review* section, pg. 6.

and it is, of course, the only piece of background information which neither necessitates nor provokes any further elaboration of her location within wider contexts of class, socio-economic status, ethnicity, regionality and/or national identity. Elsewhere, an attractive girl Sean meets in the hospital where he works helpfully asserts this key principle of textual construction at some length:

Do you know what I feel like doing? Not having that conversation where two people bore each other with their life stories. A guy who works nights in a hospital: I think I can fill in the blanks.

Viewing audiences cannot, however, and are in any case actively discouraged from feeling the need to do so. Here, the absence of character development, and the associated elaboration of wider diegetic specificity it in part entails, is not justified as an oblique commentary on the 'universal' condition of occidental urban modernity. Rather, the self-reflexive acknowledgement of *Late Night Shopping*'s representational 'blanks' becomes a marketing tool in itself. It proffers the idea of pleasurable, because knowing, audience complicity in the socially abstracted, but aphoristically accomplished, exchanges of comic dialogue that dominate the film. Symptomatically, Vincent explains to the others over their first meeting for coffee that he is "trying to be as one-dimensional as possible". Elsewhere, Jody makes a list of "things to do" in a notepad. Her self-allocated schedule—"get a life-get a job-what next?"—inadvertently indicates the extent to which *Late Night Shopping*'s preferred ideation of script and narrative structure is one in which protagonists are reduced to little more than assemblages of abstracted tics neither related to, nor explicated by, the filmmakers' investigation of material social conditions ('a job') or personal histories ('a life'). As one disgruntled contemporary critic noted, "there's no indication either from their social environment or personal history why [the central characters] should be so aimless".⁵⁰⁴ In this regard, *Late Night Shopping* proved emblematic of a much wider late-'90s misunderstanding (both creative and institutional)

⁵⁰⁴ Richards, op. cit., pg. 47. My insert.

of earlier valuable lessons about the cultural and commercial potential of certain models of script practice within a small national cinema.

Late Night Shopping and the 'Scottish' aesthetic: 'that off-kilter look'

The final sense in which *Late Night Shopping* simultaneously mimics and misinterprets the Scottish Independent template established by *Shallow Grave* relates to the former film's visual aesthetic. *Shallow Grave* and *Trainspotting*'s renowned Director of Photography, Brian Tufano (whom Saul Metzstein had first met when he worked as a runner on the former film), was employed on *Late Night Shopping*. Tufano's pervasive influence on post-*Trainspotting* Scottish cinema involved his construction of a much-imitated visual signature of domesticated surrealism. In both *Shallow Grave* and *Trainspotting*, *chiaroscuro* lightning effects in colour photography proceed in tandem with often Expressionistic camera positioning and framing of individual shots or narrative sequences.⁵⁰⁵ Moreover, many local filmmakers (including Metzstein and Lothian) found Tufano's cinematographic signature an attractive one not simply because of its close association with international commercial success. In addition, many praised the latter's work for the pervasive sense of social, physical and psychological dislocation it was held to typically impart to the film narratives it visualised. Thus, Simon Donald praised the way in which the latter characteristically created a "look [which] is slightly off-kilter".⁵⁰⁶ For Donald, Tufano's contribution typically worked to prevent a film's narrative becoming too clearly located in terms of geographical and cultural specificity. For example, in *The Life of Stuff*, Tufano's working methods and signature aesthetic helped the director achieve his conscious aim not "to root our location in the nineties in a precise city in Scotland", instead depicting an abstract "self-contained world".⁵⁰⁷ It is probably no accident, therefore, that the acclaimed cinematographer was also present on

⁵⁰⁵ Tufano discusses his contribution to *Trainspotting* at length in Andrew O. Thompson, 'Trains, Veins and Heroin Deals', in *American Cinematographer*, Vol. LXXVII n. 8 (Aug 1996), pp. 80-86.

⁵⁰⁶ Quoted in Thompson, op. cit., pg. 116.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid.

Late Night Shopping, a similarly, deliberately and representatively 'rootless' late-'90s Scottish film.

Indeed, Tufano's presence seems to have been a quite clear attempt to 'brand' *Late Night Shopping* by replicating the much-admired visual style he had developed in his earlier, more celebrated Scottish work. So distinctive was the look Tufano created for *Shallow Grave* and *Trainspotting*, and so closely did *Late Night Shopping* appear to self-consciously recreate key elements of it, that some critics saw the DoP as the auteur, or "real hero", of this film, the individual responsible for its "Edward Hopper colour schemes, slow pans and smoky dissolves".⁵⁰⁸ Even Metzstein (generously and fulsomely) acknowledged the extent of Tufano's creative contribution to *Late Night Shopping*, one which "had a more than technical connection with the material".⁵⁰⁹ He also indicated that for the film's major funder, FilmFour, Tufano was seen as the most important (because commercial proven) creative contributor to the project: "FilmFour never worried about my not being able to deliver, because he would".⁵¹⁰

As with the interlocking issues of *Late Night Shopping*'s narrative anonymity and commercially aspirant script structure, Tufano's highly visible presence on the project was directly related to a reductive conception of *Shallow Grave* and *Trainspotting* as literally replicable commercial moneyspinners for Scottish cinema. That conception structured not just this individual film, but also much creative and institutional activity within the contemporary national cinema from which it sprang. In *Late Night Shopping*, a previously innovative model of aesthetic stylisation is reduced to the status of local cinematic trademark. This parallels the extent to which earlier challenging forms of local content in films like *Trainspotting* were deliberately neutered, in a representatively calculating, yet naïve, local pursuit of mainstream commercial success at the advent of the '00s. In *Late Night Shopping*, chic snack bar replaces decaying smack den; urban *bohème* supersedes suburban housing scheme.

⁵⁰⁸ Gaby Wood, 'Other films', in *The Observer*, (24/6/01), Review section, pg. 9.

⁵⁰⁹ Metzstein, op. cit., pg. 12.

⁵¹⁰ Quoted in William Russell, 'When the director has a surprise in store', in *The Herald*, (21/6/01), pg. 22.

Of course, the above diagnosis of *Late Night Shopping* as a representative, creatively and ideologically problematic late-'90s/early-'00s Scottish film would have to undergo significant qualification if the movie had managed to truly replicate nothing of *Shallow Grave* and *Trainspotting* other than their locally enabling commercial success. Yet as already noted the former film was a marked commercial disappointment. Indeed, this disappointment forced its Glasgow-based independent producer, Ideal World, to abandon a planned expansion and diversification of the company's established television production activities to encompass cinema and other cross-media forms. When Ideal World announced pre-tax company losses of £274 000 for 2001, the producer disclosed that £246 000 of that sum was comprised of debts incurred by its infant film production arm. Announcing the consequent cessation of its film production activities in November 2002, Ideal World's Managing Director explained that, "we don't think we are big enough to make films work. Without a doubt, our focus has slipped from film to drama".⁵¹¹

Late Night Shopping is, therefore, a disquieting but representative film from late-'90s Scotland. This is so not only because it developed the 'Scottish Independent' model in ways which could be judged creatively and culturally compromised from an 'unworldly' academic critical perspective. Assessed with reference to its own preferred criteria for a 'successful' Scottish film and cinema - meaningful international commercial performance, the fostering of an entrepreneurial local independent production culture—*Late Night Shopping* must be found wanting. Moreover, this individual pattern—commercial, creative *and* national cultural regression - broadly characterises most post-*Trainspotting* Scottish Independent feature work. It also applies to the variety of wider institutional strategies for local industrial development from which such films emerged: *The Life of Stuff*/SAC Lottery Panel, *Beautiful Creatures*/DNA and Lottery Franchises, *The Acid House*/FilmFour. Sadly, the process of diminishing commercial and cultural returns embodied here is encountered once again when the late-'90s Scottish Classical

⁵¹¹ Quoted in James Ashton, 'Ideal World brings down curtain on films', in *Business A. M.*, (18/11/02), pg. 5.

strand is examined. An extended discussion of *Strictly Sinatra* illustrates the extent to which this is so.

Anywhere but here (2): Strictly Sinatra and the late-'90s Scottish Classical film

As discussed in chapter 3, *The Big Man* and *Rob Roy* instantiated the early-'90s prototype for a Scottish Classical cinema which disavowed its own culturally and industrially hybrid nature. It did this through systematic evacuation of 'foreign' elements and agents from the homogenous and 'pure' native *ethnos* constructed within individual film diegeses. The physical destruction of all narrative protagonists who can or will not ascribe to MacGregor's heroic, anti-modern, Highland Scottishness in *Rob Roy* is one example of that process in action. What is striking about much of the Scottish Classical cinema which followed *Rob Roy*, however, is the extent to which it performed a negative image of the same ideological manoeuvre. *Strictly Sinatra*, for example, also represents a Scottish national culture and identity centrally marked by its mono-ethnicity. Here, though, it is the 'foreign' elements and agents (spearheaded by Sinatra and the Great American Songbook) which have vanquished their native counterparts. While literal and/or imaginative individual emigration to the Americas cannot be countenanced in *Rob Roy*, *Strictly Sinatra* presents everything else as unendurable. The delirious wish-fulfilment underpinning Tony's climactic escape to the USA's eastern seaboard, "a very unconvincing happy ending... safely ending up in good ol' pre-September 11 New York, New York."⁵¹², makes this painfully clear. Indeed, in some ways, this film could not be said to have a happy ending at all: Tony's isolated escape only underscores the grimness of the rest of Scottish society's entrapment within a peripheral culture subjugated by autocratic American cultural capital.

⁵¹² Peter Bradshaw, 'Review: *Strictly Sinatra*', in *The Guardian*, (9/11/2001) @ http://film.guardian.co.uk/News_Story/Critic_Review/Guardian_review/0..590197.00.html <accessed 9/6/02>

When the late-'90s Scottish Classical movement is examined in wider detail, its two defining representational characteristics are ideologically troubling ones. First, the relevant films both represent *and* instantiate a markedly self-abnegating form of Scottish culture, one whose acute self-consciousness (as in *Strictly Sinatra*) actually leads it to accept rather than question its own self-denigration. Second (and here there *is* a direct line of continuity with *The Big Man* and *Rob Roy*), these movies also construct images of national culture and identity which are profoundly and regressively phallogentric. Discussion of *Strictly Sinatra* which then widens out to encompass other relevant local films of the period illustrates both points.

Strictly Sinatra employs its central character, hapless fifth rate crooner Tony Cocozza, as the personification of a national culture acutely aware of its own historic marginality and limitations. Throughout the film, Tony's musical performances strain to disavow all signs of local particularity. His accent and phrasing are odd, attempted facsimiles of the Master's. And, as a matter of principle, Tony will only sing songs from the Sinatra repertoire. He utters the final words of the film, "let's go home", to his girlfriend Irene against the backdrop of a central Manhattan thoroughfare. These are clearly the sentiments and actions of an individual wholly alienated from, and dismissive of, his native cultural heritage. Tellingly, the deeply internalised state of imagined Americanness displayed by Tony is shared by many other characters in *Strictly Sinatra*. A leading figure within the Glasgow underworld is venerated because he worked in Las Vegas during the 1960s and was allegedly acquainted with Sinatra himself. Indeed, the city's criminal fraternity *per se* is presented as a weirdly displaced after-echo of the 'Rat Pack' scene and myth. Elsewhere, central narrative locations such as the Scots-Italian café where Tony drinks coffee and the casino patronised by the local mafia are depicted as cultural shrines, both dominated by huge murals of the New York skyline that function in similar ways to religious icons. The occupants of café and casino alike use the murals to temporarily convince themselves that they have ascended to an American Heaven from a Scottish Vale of Tears. Indeed, Capaldi recycles the joke with which he opened his script for *Soft Top, Hard Shoulder*, when Tony tells Irene that the café is run by an Italian immigrant who couldn't afford to get to America and had to settle for Scotland instead,

hence, the elaborate compensatory masquerade which his mural embodies. Characters' imagined American-ness in *Strictly Sinatra* is not used to organise protagonists into schema of 'good' and 'bad', central and peripheral; rather, that state comes to be identified as coterminous with contemporary Scottish identity.

Accordingly, *Strictly Sinatra* displays its own credentials as a 'Scottish' film in the lengths to which it goes to reference and replicate moments from the American cinematic tradition: real local filmmakers behave in a very similar way to the fictional local characters they create. Thus, in a fleeting moment of heady, self-conscious transcendence and multilayered quotation, Tony lights a cigarette for a passing sailor in 1940s American navy uniform while watching Irene drink coffee alone at the café counter on the other side of the street. Although stuck in Glasgow, for an instant he is rapturously transported, out *On the Town* (Gene Kelly/Stanley Donen, USA, 1949) with Gene and Frank. Irene is simultaneously framed in the lit café interior by a shot in which Tony's literal and subjective points of view blur into one another. The composition of this shot replicates the American painter Edward Hopper's most famous work, 'Nighthawks' (1942). Perhaps, however, the most appropriate and telling reference point for this rapturous moment is not in fact Hopper's original, but its parodic reproduction by the Austrian artist Gottfried Helnwein, 'Boulevard of Broken Dreams' (1987). In that work, Helnwein replaces the anonymous drinkers of the Hopper original with Elvis Presley, Humphrey Bogart and Marilyn Monroe. Helnwein's self-conscious, external fascination with a glamorous myth of mid-twentieth century American culture and identity parallels and echoes that of Tony and his creators.

Elsewhere in *Strictly Sinatra*'s narrative, Tony engineers his one and only television appearance, performing in an amateur talent contest, through mafia blackmail of a local television producer. This sequence, of course, deliberately parallels rumours surrounding the foundations of Sinatra's Hollywood acting career. However, it is also deeply indebted to the definitive popular cultural portrayal of this episode of the Sinatra myth, the notorious 'horse's head' sequence of *The Godfather* (Francis Ford Coppola, USA, 1972). But, in an echo of Tony's painful awareness of his and Scotland's marginality and

mediocrity when set beside Frank and America, *Strictly Sinatra* replaces silk sheets and defenestrated thoroughbreds with a quiet word at the urinals of an unspecified Glasgow boozier. This particular sequence, and indeed this film as a whole, displays a tortured self-reflexivity in its material replication of Tony's fictional misfortune: a purportedly characteristic 'Scottish' inability to do anything other than bowdlerise American popular cultural traditions, through their unimaginative repetition on the cheap.

Strictly Sinatra's closing titles further amplify the film's simultaneous representation and instantiation of a self-alienated contemporary Scottish culture and identity. Lewis Taylor (appropriately enough, a white British soul singer) performs 'New York, New York' as Tony and Irene arrive 'home' for perhaps the first time in their lives. Song, singer and cityscape combine to instantiate the heady American *mythos* which suffused much 1990s Scottish cinema, and that cinema's inflated international commercial ambitions:

Start spreading the news
I'm leaving today
I want to be a part of it
New York, New York

Indeed, the pilgrimage motif central to 'New York, New York' illustrates the extent to which the mythical 'America' the song conjures is so resonant that it exerts an otherworldly lure even over inhabitants of that national culture itself, 'America' as a place one must 'leave' in order to 'be part of'. Within *Strictly Sinatra*'s diegesis, Tony actively, consciously internalises this utopian American myth and identity. He quite literally leaves behind the 'little town blues' associated with inhabitation of peripheral Scottish equivalents. Analogously, post-*Shallow Grave* Scottish filmmakers increasingly came to defer naively to US cinematic genres and cultural myths ('It's up to you, New York'). This contrasted sharply with the critical appropriation of the same traditions which had contributed so significantly to the heady industrial, commercial and national cultural successes of the mid-decade. Brief consideration of another late-'90s Scottish Classical movie, *The Near Room*, indicates the extent to which this was so.

'It's up to you': national cultural deference in late-'90s Scottish Classical cinema

The Near Room, as already noted in chapter 4, was trumpeted by its makers and local critics as a 'tartan noir'. The film's plot is—in the best *noir* tradition—exceptionally convoluted. Recently returned to Scotland after a five year sojourn in New York, Charlie Colquhoun is an investigative tabloid journalist working in an unnamed local city. His ongoing estrangement from a daughter he fathered in his teenage years consumes him with guilt. Charlie's overriding obsession, painstakingly established by his voiceover narration of *The Near Room*'s opening scene, is to be reunited with his lost child. Attempting to break a story concerning a child prostitution ring in his home city, Charlie makes two startling discoveries. Firstly, that his daughter (now named 'Tommy') is implicated in this organised paedophilia. Secondly, that an establishment cover-up allows that abuse to continue unpunished. A succession of characters from across the social spectrum of the city—including celebrity lawyers, High Court judges, prostitutes, police informers and Tommy's teenage boyfriend Kevin—are interrogated by Charlie in his quest to save his daughter.

As with *Strictly Sinatra*, *The Near Room* is interpellated to a vertiginous degree by a range of American film genres, popular cultural mythologies and historical male hero figures. 'Scotland' once again is depicted as a culture near-exclusively populated by men in thrall to the influence of their transatlantic avatars. For example, the very first line of the film, from Charlie's opening monologue (itself a deferential nod to *noir* convention), is: "He was talking about the great fights: the 'Rumble in the Jungle', the 'Thriller in Manila'". The 'great fights' in question are, of course, two of Muhammad Ali's most legendary bouts. Accompanying Charlie's words, *The Near Room*'s first image is a close-up of Ali's face from a videotaped recording of the one of the fights, playing on Charlie's television set. From its very outset, therefore, *The Near Room* is, like *Strictly Sinatra*, a representative late-'90s Scottish Classical movie not simply in terms of its central influences and reference points, but also in its self-conscious proclamation and repeated foregrounding of these.

Moreover, like *Strictly Sinatra*, *The Near Room* simultaneously depicts and instantiates a vision of Scotland as 'American cultural colony'. On his first meeting with Charlie, a suspicious Kevin (who thinks that the former is yet another of Tommy's abusive punters) quotes Ali at his most radically defiant: "the Vietcong never called me nigger". He then hooks Charlie in the face. Sporting a cut lip for the rest of the narrative, the latter is then repeatedly asked by characters he meets, "What happened to your mouth?" The success of the attempted running joke is dependent on viewers' prior acquaintance with canonical American *noir*, specifically, the incongruity generated by the prominence of Jack Nicholson's slashed nostril for much of *Chinatown*. It could also be noted that *The Near Room*, like *Chinatown*, conceives parental sexual abuse as the *sine qua non* of human corruption. Elsewhere, the editor of the local tabloid Charlie works for takes unlikely solace in T. S. Eliot's 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' (1917) after his unruly charge abruptly resigns: "Birth, copulation and death: he'll be back". Closely echoing *Strictly Sinatra*, the identities and discourses of nearly all *The Near Room*'s male characters are functionally transposed from already-existing American analogues that are also avatars. In both films this applies equally to characters regardless of their narrative centrality or marginality and/or moral authority. Imagined American-ness becomes the keynote of contemporary Scottish identity.

The Near Room simultaneously instantiates and imagines just this type of national culture and identity. Fittingly, the film's local male creators reproduce actions, words and identities derived from American cinema and popular culture just as literally and extensively as do the local male characters they put onscreen. The meaning and origin of *The Near Room*'s cryptic title offers a vivid example of this process of 'Art imitating Life'. Charlie ostensibly coins the phrase during his opening monologue, giving name to an isolated, traumatised form of masculine subjectivity "where snakes scream and alligators play trombones". In interview, Robert Murphy, *The Near Room*'s screenwriter, confirmed that the film's title directly referred to "the name given to the psychological place where childhood fears are confronted".⁵¹³ It is, however, the character of Kevin

⁵¹³ Quoted in Anon, 'The Near Room', in *The Independent*, (12/4/97), *Eye* section, n. pg. ref. (BFI Reading Room microfiche).

who explains the phrase's meaning and provenance most clearly, telling Charlie that, "Muhammad's been there... where I am now: the Near Room". For both Kevin and his creator, 'The Near Room', both quote and concept, are traceable to Ali's famous description of his 1974 World Heavyweight Title fight with George Foreman, the legendary 'Rumble in the Jungle' cited by Charlie right at *The Near Room*'s outset. Murphy noted that he uncovered the original quote and its historical source during the scriptwriting process for *The Near Room*. He decided that Ali's utterance was both congruent with, and conferred a degree of universal, mythic resonance upon, what might otherwise be an overly local Scottish film.⁵¹⁴ Thus, the film's writer—not to mention its director and the Glasgow Film Fund, its key local financier (see the previous discussion of this film in chapter 4)—were as enthusiastic acolytes of American cinematic and popular culture as the fictional characters they brought to the screen. Negative contemporary reviews noted that in general terms, "the uncritical way in which *The Near Room* embraces US *film noir* cliché... end[s] up stripping the city [of Glasgow] of any local identity".⁵¹⁵ Of course, the point is that such 'uncritical embrace' is 'local identity' as this film and its creators respectively depict and practice it, a largely uncritical local capitulation to a bowdlerised *lingua Americana*.

The same simultaneous ideation and instantiation of Scottish identity also surfaces in a far more self-reflexive contemporary local engagement with mid-twentieth century American culture and Classical cinema, John Byrne's homonymous 1997 film adaptation of his seminal 1970s *Slab Boys* theatrical trilogy. Byrne noted of his film that, "we all agreed that it was a 'studio' picture, i.e., to get the 'look' and feel of 1957 Paisley—a sort of 'mythic' Paisley".⁵¹⁶ Within the film's impressively stylised, studio-bound representation of that urban west coast Scotland, characters routinely express a profoundly idealised and internalised Scottish version of American culture and identity. Lucille, the Monroe-esque office pinup of the carpet factory that is the film's central narrative location, fantasises about winning the firm's annual talent contest, because a

⁵¹⁴ See Matthew Magee, 'Film Noir with a Glaswegian Accent', in *Scotland in Sunday*, (8/5/97), *Spectrum* section, pg. 12.

⁵¹⁵ Geoffrey Macnab, 'Review: *The Near Room*', in *Sight & Sound*, Vol. 7. 4 (Apr 1997), pg. 46. My insert.

⁵¹⁶ John Byrne, *The Slab Boys: original screenplay* (London: Faber & Faber, 1997), pg. vii.

self-proclaimed local show business agent has promised that, “If I come first, he’s going to fly me to America”. Elsewhere, Spanky, one of the eponymous slab boys, or industrial paint mixers, plans to emigrate to the US. He speculates with his friend Phil about what would have happened, “if you and me had been brung up in the States... Yankee comics... our ain transport”, his reverie playing out against the backdrop of a fantasy sequence in which the boys cavort in a pink Cadillac. On another occasion, Spanky is troubled by the incongruity of a pristine art deco café somewhere on or just off Paisley High Street serving hot peas and Bovril to its patrons. He can only speculate in impotent fashion as to how different (and, needless to say, much better) things would be, “if this were the Mississippi Delta”. Thus, in a parallel satiation of the longings expressed by the characters he creates, Byrne temporarily transforms contemporary Scottish cinema into its Classical American equivalent. He achieves this through a loving recreation and hybridisation of the fantastical studio aesthetic of the 1950s MGM Musical with the genre conventions of the teenpic, a cycle which emerged during the same era. Spanky and Phil become modest, unthreatening local analogues of the ambiguously charismatic, non-conformist American teenage heroes of *The Wild One* (László Benedek, USA, 1953) or *Rebel Without a Cause* (Nicholas Ray, USA, 1955).

‘Nothing to say’? Gender in late-’90s Scottish Classical cinema

The late-’90s Scottish Classical cycle was sorely compromised, ideologically speaking, by its uncritical prostration before a profoundly idealised version of mid-twentieth century American popular culture and identity. Yet this was not the movement’s only troubling characteristic in that regard. Following on from the example of early-’90s work such as *The Big Man* and *Rob Roy*, later Scottish Classical works like *Strictly Sinatra* and *The Near Room* typically presented a profoundly phallogentric vision of ‘Scotland’ and ‘Scottishness’. Catherine Kerrigan argues that late twentieth-century Scottish society’s ever-hardening view of itself as a historically oppressed and marginalised entity led to an internally policed marginalisation of non-nationalist forms of identity politics. This was and is, she argues, a process in which “gender issues are invariably subsumed by the

nationalist imperative”⁵¹⁷ driving contemporary Scottish culture’s production, consumption and interpretation. Echoing this view, Andrea Howson complains that late twentieth-century Scottish literature routinely conflates nationality and biology, representing and constructing ‘Scotland’ in such a way that “men are prime subjects and authors and women and ethnic groups are discussed in marginal terms”.⁵¹⁸ Certainly, the examples of late-’90s Scottish Classical cinema so far discussed seem to illustrate Kerrigan and Howson’s macrocosmic assertions in microcosmic action. In *Strictly Sinatra*, women are almost wholly absent from local milieus of crime and cabaret dominated by displaced ‘father/son’ relationships. *The Near Room*, as befits its self-conscious desire to be a Scottish *noir*, foregrounds a taciturn male hero fastidiously tailored to fit the half-century old archetype of the laconic ‘urban knight’. Enthusiastic adherence to generic precedent also rationalises that film’s central theme, the expression and exploration of emotionally cauterised masculine subjectivity.

Such issues return us to a major problem with the particular form of cultural hybridisation found in the Scottish Classical cycle, flagged earlier in discussion of *The Big Man* and *Rob Roy*. The meeting between American influence and local aspiration key to this movement typically works to reiterate, rather than revise, certain powerfully regressive Scottish popular cultural traditions and myths. Key here is the native cultural construction of ideal masculinity embodied in the figure of the hard-drinking, pugilistic, west coast Hard Man. To a greater or lesser degree across all 1990s Scottish Classical films, any alternative form of local masculinity is largely ignored. If not passed over, such forms are instead caricaturially dismissed, in the words of one of *The Near Room*’s hard-bitten newshounds, as “liberal-girlie-man-pinko-horse manure”. Tellingly, the particular Studio era genres utilised by 1990s Scottish filmmakers—most frequently of all, the Western—were strongly gendered in masculine terms. The influence of contemporaneous, equally available, but more ‘feminine’ historic alternatives such as the Hollywood Musical or Melodrama was conspicuously absent from the individual films and wider national

⁵¹⁷ Catherine Kerrigan, ‘Nationalism and Gender: Scottish myths of the female’, in *études écossaises*, Vol. 1 (1992), pg. 110.

⁵¹⁸ Alexandra Howson, ‘No Gods and Precious Few Women: gender and cultural identity in Scotland’, in *Scottish Affairs*, n. 2 (Winter 1993), pg. 48.

cinema discussed here. This aspect of Scottish film culture's development during the 1990s testified to the acuity of earlier feminist anxieties about an emergent local cinema wholly dominated (because primarily legitimised by and constructed within) discourses of cultural nationalism. Connie Balides, for example, cautioned in 1984 against a national cinema whose constituent members did not require it to explore and express sub- and non-national identities and communities within Scotland, so producing films which "deal[] with the issue of Scotland at the expense of the [place of] wom[e]n [within Scotland]".⁵¹⁹ The extent to which late-'90s Scottish Classical cinema typically conflated national identity with masculinity can be vividly illustrated through discussion of one film from this cycle, *The Debt Collector*.

The Debt Collector centres, like those of Scottish Classical predecessors *The Big Man*, *Rob Roy* and *The Near Room*, on a fatal antagonism between two male protagonists. These are Nicky Dryden, a thinly fictionalised version of the notorious criminal turned artist and writer Jimmy Boyle, and Keltie, the obsessive, sexually repressed working class policeman who arrested the former for his heinous crimes some twenty years before *The Debt Collector*'s narrative opens. Dryden is long released from prison, but Keltie obsessively disrupts the former's public rehabilitation; married to Val, a successful journalist and author, Nicky is enjoying his newfound status as a nationally feted sculptor. Keltie's vendetta is fuelled by twin pathologies, firstly, a grotesque ideation of 'justice', and second, an uncontrollable lust for Val. His persecution quickly escalates out of control, however, leaving Val's son Scott (an appropriate choice of name in the context of this film's portentously allegorical narrative) murdered by a young petty criminal, Keltie's elderly mother nearly killed in a violent assault, Val raped by Keltie, and the latter finally stabbed to death in a desperate act of self-defence by Nicky, during a climactic duel enacted against the backdrop of the annual Military Tattoo at Edinburgh Castle.

⁵¹⁹ Connie Balides, 'Another Time, Another Place... Another male view?', in *Cencrastus*, n. 16 (Spring 1984), pg. 41. My inserts.

In accompanying publicity material and press coverage of *The Debt Collector*, the film's writer/director, playwright Anthony Neilson, clearly positioned his debut feature as a native scion of Classical Hollywood tradition, "an old-school classically motivated tragedy, of the genre that Hollywood seems to have abandoned".⁵²⁰ *The Debt Collector* was, the film's creator argued, a modern-day 'tartan western' that critically explored dominant constructions of Scottish national identity ("a country that feels itself oppressed... divided against itself on one level"⁵²¹) and masculinity ("do[ing] for the Scottish hard man what *Unforgiven* [Clint Eastwood, USA, 1992] did for the Western"⁵²²). With regards to both the universalising scale of *The Debt Collector*'s overview of contemporary Scottish society and identity, not to mention its extended engagement with American cinema, Neilson even portrayed the film as "a kind of sequel"⁵²³ to *Braveheart*. Strikingly, he did not defend such local alignment with US film genre and national myth by claiming that it enabled a particular, politically engaged utterance on the state of contemporary Scotland. For Neilson, the point to Scottish inhabitation of such non-indigenous cultural phenomena was not that it facilitated a politicised speech act. Rather, it *constituted* such an act, simply in and of itself: "my use of widescreen and melodramatic music is, in a sense, political... our stories can be as big as anyone else's".⁵²⁴ The strong sense of uncritical self-aggrandisement evident in such comments is directly reflected in the thematics of a film which ends up reiterating the macho shibboleths of Scottish national culture and gender politics which it claimed to revise.

The Debt Collector's treatment of the character of Val is telling in this regard. Even Anthony Neilson himself conceded that her narrative role was "a thankless one... women in this film are really the collateral damage in this squabble between men".⁵²⁵ Despite the film's apparently sympathetic portrayal of her as an innocent victim of male violence,

⁵²⁰ Neilson quoted in *The Debt Collector Press Pack*, pg. 12 (BFI Reading Room microfiche).

⁵²¹ Neilson quoted in Brian Logan, 'Are you looking at me?', in *The Guardian*, (18/6/99), *Review* section, pg. 7.

⁵²² Ibid.

⁵²³ Quoted in Liese Spencer, 'Small country, big ideas', in *The Independent*, (29/4/99), *Review* section, pg. 11.

⁵²⁴ Ibid.

⁵²⁵ Quoted in *The Debt Collector Press Pack*, op. cit., pg. 12.

Val is made physically and psychologically abject by the narrative's conclusion. Her initial private agency (the socially and emotionally dominant partner in her marriage) and its public equivalent (her status as a respected psychotherapist and author) are both completely destroyed. Rendered catatonic with grief by her son's murder and subsequent rape at the hands of Keltie, Val ends up a traumatised pawn in the fatal struggle played out between her husband and his nemesis, to a powerless appendage of her husband's physical person, criminal past and national myth.

Val's traumas quite literally rob her of the power of speech as *The Debt Collector* progresses. Early in the film she attempts to commence writing an article on a subject intimately related to her own personal history: 'How do we forgive?' But on this single occasion that Val the author is shown at work, it is whilst *failing* to write. Faced with a blank computer screen, she is instead consumed by the dilemma of whether to use her maiden or married name on the unwritten article's byline. Val's father speaks the literal truth in the film's final scene, when he informs Nicky, who has just been acquitted of Keltie's murder, that "she's got nothing to say to you". Elsewhere in the film, she forms part of an audience intently (and silently) watching an interview with her husband broadcast live on national radio. In this, Nicky pontificates on "the Scottish working class mentality of the underdog". Keltie's mother's modest council house has become a shrine to her son's professional success, dotted with framed photographs of him in police uniform and press clippings documenting his public triumph in arresting Dryden two decades earlier. In the very last scene of the film, immediately after his acquittal on the charge of Keltie's murder, Dryden is approached by a gauche young policeman eager for his copy of the former's autobiography to be signed by its celebrity author, craving the imprimatur of a literary and near-mythical national icon. These episodes, alongside Val's ultimate inability to adjudicate between Nicky and Keltie's damaged masculinities, are symptomatic of the extent to which the debate about contemporary Scotland *The Debt Collector* so ostentatiously stages is couched in exclusively masculine terms. The film's self-proclaimed progressive intentions are therefore stymied from the outset. Despite Neilson's belief that *The Debt Collector* explicitly set out to deconstruct regressive models of Scottish masculinity and national identity, its interrogative approach to such

issues is one in which, by definition, women have 'nothing to say to you'. Instead, an ossified, Welfarist working class masculine identity (Keltie) and its emergent individualised, entrepreneurial, socially mobile successor (Nicky) prosecute each others' mutually assured destruction. They inadvertently kill a sketchily imagined third masculine model untouched by the divisive and self-constraining class allegiances of the past (Scott) in the process.

The Debt Collector is a representatively problematic example of the approach taken to questions of gender and national identities in late-'90s Scottish Classical cinema. In this film, as in the wider cycle *per se*, 'Scotland' is a culture whose internal workings and ideological meanings are always regulated by masculine authority figures, however compromised. Female characters meekly accept subjugate status to, or are physically violated by, such 'heroes', while 'lesser' men worship and attempt to emulate them. Certainly, the Scottish Classical cycle was occasionally willing to attempt a critique of the 'Hard Man' myth of national identity, as *The Debt Collector* shows. Yet this willingness is not matched by an ability to imagine alternatives which might progressively supplant, or even simply take place alongside, the former. We might note in this regard, the salient difference between the physical and psychological traumas visited upon Val and those suffered by Dryden and Keltie in *The Debt Collector*. The public and mythical authority of the two men within the Scottish sphere is perversely amplified by their disastrous feud; they will now loom larger and longer in the national consciousness than would previously have been the case. In stark contrast, Val's far more modest, non-violent public status is utterly destroyed by the narrative's conclusion. So in thrall to the conflation of national identity and masculinity is the Scottish Classical cycle that it cannot imagine anything other than this linkage. This is so even when (as in *The Debt Collector*) individual films understand many of the historic cultural and ideological problems precipitated by it.

Yanks Go Home? Gregory's 2 Girls and the anti-American view of 1990s Scottish cinema

The proceeding survey of the Scottish Independent and Scottish Classical cycles post-*Trainspotting* hopefully indicates their continuing centrality within Scottish film culture, as the 1990s wore to a close. Yet while the late '90s saw these cycles maintain the importance they had gained in the early decade, they became as industrially, ideologically and creatively problematic post-1995/96 as they had previously proved progressive. Aside from the radical political criteria typically accruing to an academic Film Studies analysis, the local Independent and Classical cycles ultimately proved unsustainable in entrepreneurial and commercial terms. In other words, such films can be deemed 'failures' even by the evaluative yardstick predominantly proposed by their makers and funders. After *Trainspotting*, no other 1990s 'Scottish-American' film enjoyed any significant success at the domestic, let alone international, box office. The poor to disastrous domestic box office performances of *The Near Room*, *Strictly Sinatra*, *Late Night Shopping* and *Beautiful Creatures* have already been noted; the comparable failures of *The Debt Collector* (UK theatrical gross £107 970), *The Slab Boys* (£15 911) and most depressingly of all, *The Life of Stuff* (£4438) simply reiterate the same unwelcome fact.⁵²⁶ To an increasing number of contemporary observers at the end of the decade, Scottish cinema's 1990s 'American adventure' seemed destined to end in disillusionment and decline. Such is the analysis of the contemporary moment found, for example, in *Gregory's 2 Girls*.

Gregory's 2 Girls was Bill Forsyth's first Scottish-produced and -themed feature since *Comfort and Joy*. During the intervening fifteen year period, Forsyth had pursued his directorial career working in North America, a period culminating in a commercially and critically disastrous major studio project, the \$23m *Being Human* (USA, 1993), a star vehicle for Robin Williams. Repeatedly re-cut and -edited by financiers Warner Bros.,

⁵²⁶ For *The Debt Collector*, see Dyja (ed.), *BFI Film and Television Handbook 2001*, op. cit., pg. 39; for *Slab Boys*, see Dyja (ed.), *The BFI Film and Television Handbook 1999* (London: BFI, 1998), pg. 32; for *Life of Stuff*, see Brian Pendreigh, 'It was billed as the new *Trainspotting*. It made £4,438. What went wrong?', in *The Guardian*, (15/1/99), *Friday Review* section, pp. 6-7.

the film received minimal theatrical distribution in both Britain and the USA.⁵²⁷ Forsyth's retrospective depiction of this unhappy episode in his career was one prone to hyperbole. Prolonged exposure to the working practices of American financiers and producers had not simply forced an individual career retrenchment, it had destroyed his belief in the cultural and artistic potential inherent in cinema *per se*: "there's a huge discrepancy between what a [Hollywood] studio expects of a movie and what an eccentric [Scottish] filmmaker like me expects... my perception of film has been reduced."⁵²⁸ The central thematic concern of *Gregory's 2 Girls*, the innately destructive effects of American corporate and cultural capital as experienced within a specifically Scottish context, therefore possesses a tantalisingly jaundiced, autobiographical undertow.

Gregory's 2 Girls marked a self-conscious return to the eponymous central character and narrative setting, the Scottish Central Belt 'New Town' of Cumbernauld, from Forsyth's second feature, *Gregory's Girl*. This loose sequel updates the circumstances of both some two decades later. 'Greg' now teaches English at the same comprehensive school he attended as a teenager. While the world around him has moved on, he emphatically has not. This relates to more than just his unchanging place of domicile. In both male heterosexual and ideological terms, Greg is no more mature than when audiences were first introduced to his character. He avoids the romantic advances of a colleague in favour of a crush on an attractive teenager (but now, of course, one of his pupils, not his peers). He also uses his professional authority to pursue a platitudinous career of armchair activism, smugly inculcating political 'awareness' in his young charges. Yet he himself is not involved in any form of direct political activity. The film's narrative charts the uncertain course of Greg's simultaneous and interrelated sexual and political maturations. Prompted by the pupil who forms the object of his guilty fixation, Greg engages in direct action against a local electronics firm run by an old school friend, Fraser. Fraser's company is covertly manufacturing torture equipment for use in the Third World. Greg

⁵²⁷ Indeed, at a specially organised screening of *Being Human* at the Glasgow Film Theatre in 1994, Forsyth began a question and answer session by apologising to the audience for the film he had come to discuss.

⁵²⁸ Quoted in Allan Hunter, 'Being Human: interview with Bill Forsyth', in *Sight & Sound*, Vol. 4.8 (Aug 1994), pg. 27. My inserts.

also finally begins a relationship with the adult colleague whose advances he had previously spurned.

Many critics found *Gregory's 2 Girls* a bemusing film, "remarkable for exploding most of our perceptions of what constitutes a Forsythian movie."⁵²⁹ The central departure from established auteurist precedent involved the new film's overtly politicised critique of contemporary Scottish culture and society viewed in a global economic and political context. *Gregory's 2 Girls* takes a dyspeptic view of American economic and cultural influence within modern Scotland. That influence is seen as excessive to the point of moral corruption, both individual and national. If *Gregory's 2 Girls* evidently returns to one 'Forsythian movie' in narrative terms, far more significant is the extent to which it deliberately 'explodes' the ideological premise underlying another of its maker's seminal early-'80s Scottish movies, *Local Hero*.

Like *Gregory's 2 Girls*, *Local Hero* foregrounds markedly uneven economic relations holding between Scottish and American societies and their individual representatives. In *Local Hero*'s narrative, a Texan multi-national corporation, Knox Oil, attempts to buy the entire village of Ferness, located on Scotland's northwest seaboard. Knox plans to raze the community to the ground and construct a massive oil terminal in its place. The small native community overshadowed by a latter-day, generously subsidised version of Highland Clearance cannot compete, financially speaking, with the economic muscle of US corporate capitals. However, the guileful Highlanders collectively entrance MacInyre, the American asset stripper sent to buy them off their land, with an idyllic but consciously fabricated masquerade of pre-Modern native identity and culture. Yet they do this not to save their village and way of life, but to inflate the price they can demand for vacating one and relinquishing the other. *Local Hero*'s climax, however, sees the equally pecuniary and premeditated plans of Americans and Scots alike derailed. So entranced by the cultural capital wielded by their Scottish antagonists are the normally hard-headed representatives of Knox Oil, that they abandon their plans to build a refinery. Knox instead preserves the village and finances the construction of a major marine reserve and

⁵²⁹ Ajay Close, 'The Forsyth Saga', in *The Scotsman*, (7/8/99), *Weekend* section, pg. 1.

astronomical observatory nearby. Unable to *openly* contest the fickle will - but implacable material might - of the multinational, the villagers find that they have inadvertently dashed the dream of untold riches by their own hand. 'America' deploys its surfeit of economic and infrastructural capital to bend 'Scotland' to its will; the latter retaliates with its superior cultural equivalent. The two sides cancel each other out in a process of Mutually Assured Distraction.

For many original observers of *Local Hero*, such comic filigree seemed like political equivocation, if not outright evasion. Nick Roddick, for example, complained that Forsyth deliberately sidestepped pressing contemporary socio-political issues, namely the "almost boundless power, the power to destroy"⁵³⁰ wielded by American corporate interests in Highland Scotland during the late-'70s/early-'80s North Sea oil boom. Even before *Local Hero*, some sceptics were already asking of Forsyth's first two features, *That Sinking Feeling* (GB, 1979) and *Gregory's Girl*, whether there was

Not something amiss with comedies that offend absolutely no-one? ... Great comedy actively raises awkward questions and does not, as is occasionally the case in Forsyth, consciously suppress them.⁵³¹

Indeed, whether welcomed or not, an early-'80s critical consensus quickly coalesced around the idea that Forsyth's first four local features were semi-detached from a directly politicised intervention within questions of national society and identity, neglecting "to impose or even suggest any programme of Scottish political or cultural redemption".⁵³²

Forsyth did not ignore such critical sniping at the time. He claimed his films privileged a humanistic exploration of individual psychology over a lumpen exposition of tribalistic ideology, nationalist or otherwise:

⁵³⁰ Nick Roddick, 'A light in the sky', in *Sight & Sound*, Vol. 52. 2 (Spring 1983), pg. 138.

⁵³¹ Neil Sinyard, 'The Forsyth Saga', in *Films Illustrated*, Vol. 10 n. 119 (Aug 1981), pp. 424-5.

⁵³² Scott L. Malcolmson, 'Modernism comes to the Cabbage Patch: Bill Forsyth and the "Scottish cinema"', in *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 38 n. 3 (Spring 1985), pp. 18.

I'm very self-conscious about using politics in film. I don't want to make films that are about something, I don't want to make a film that is about a man in a post-industrial urban society who is trying to find out who he is and what he is doing. I don't want to make films about what it is like to be him.⁵³³

This general dictum applied the oblique approach taken by *Local Hero* to the then volatile question of 'Scotland's Oil':

I didn't relish the idea of two months clambering around hard, cold metal girders heaving about in the sea, so I divorced it from the hardware. It seemed to me the human things were more interesting... It seemed a similar thing to *Brigadoon* which also involved Americans coming to Scotland... being changed by the experience and affecting the place in their own way.⁵³⁴

Archived utterances like these make clearer the extent to which *Gregory's 2 Girls* was not simply, or even predominantly, intended by Forsyth as an updating of *Gregory's Girl*. Rather, this later film constituted a more fundamental, self-willed reorientation of the director's practice, newly conceived by him as a direct political intervention within national sphere. Tellingly, *Gregory's 2 Girls* is *precisely* a film about 'a man in a post-industrial urban society who is trying to find out who he is'. It connects questions of 'humanity' with those of 'hardware', rather than compartmentalising them. The electronics technology and associated multinational investment that, in Fraser's words, "creat[es] 400 high quality jobs in your home town" is also that which, Greg and his pupils discover, enables the manufacture and export of sophisticated torture equipment to dictatorial regimes in Africa.

⁵³³ Quoted in Dominique Toyoux, 'Tidings of Comfort and Joy', in *Film Directions*, Vol. 7 n. 26 (1985), pg. 6.

⁵³⁴ Quoted in Quentin Falk, 'Local Heroes', in *Sight & Sound*, Vol. 51. 4 (Autumn 1982), pg. 226.

Gregory's 2 Girls diagnoses contemporary Scotland as a doubly repressed nation. This is so institutionally, through the country's subjugation within the British State apparatus. In a more fundamental ideological sense, however, Scotland is also understood as subjugate to the dictates of American corporate capital and audiovisual and popular cultures. When first seen teaching an English class, Greg's attempts to stimulate political consciousness in his students—"don't spectate; participate"—are rudely and symptomatically interrupted by the ceaseless encroachment of gaudy Americana. A number of clearly uninterested female students abruptly leave the lesson to take part in cheerleading practice for the school's new American Football team. Not only do these girls ignore Greg's political advice, they act in a diametrically opposed fashion, not 'participating' but 'spectating', albeit in a very specific, glamorised and ritualised form. The early implication is that younger generations of Scottish society inhabit a 'cheerleading' role in their relationship to American culture, in ways that go far beyond the literal. (Proper) Football, a traditionally central component of Scottish popular culture and a key part of characters' daily lives in the original *Gregory's Girl*, appears to have disappeared without a whimper. For Greg, such things are evidence of "just one more way America dominates the world". This individual analysis is echoed by the film as a whole, to the extent that many took "the insidious invasion of corporate America"⁵³⁵ to be *Gregory's 2 Girls*' central preoccupation. Philip French, for example, argued that this film shared remarkable similarities of plot and theme with *Carla's Song*, another "story of a Scottish drifter's politicisation"⁵³⁶ when faced with American interference within the domestic affairs of a small nation (here, Nicaragua).

Significantly in this regard, the unifying feature of the classroom scenes in *Gregory's 2 Girls* involves Greg's repeated attempts to indoctrinate his students with an absolute disdain for what he presents as an 'objective' portrayal of contemporary American mores. With the sort of blithe recourse to national stereotype he would probably view as an exclusively American preserve, Greg informs his classes (and, of course, the film's viewing audience) that so superstitious is the US populace that one third of it claims to

⁵³⁵ Janice Forsyth, 'Mixing it', in *The Herald*, (21/10/99), *Mix* section, pg. 5.

⁵³⁶ Philip French, 'Review: *Gregory's 2 Girls*', in *The Observer*, (17/10/99), *Review* section, pg. 9.

have experienced angelic visitations. Greg's two captive audiences, fictive students and real spectators, are also invited to react to the alleged fact that every 24 hours, 35 000 people die of malnutrition around the globe, while over the same period US citizens spend \$100m on slimming products.

It is notable that Greg's attempts to indoctrinate his students form the *only* example of his initially dominant character traits and actions not systematically deconstructed as a fatally compromised mark of personal immaturity. In many regards, Greg is simply—if crudely and inconsistently—attempting to relay on to his young charges the insights he himself gains from his quasi-religious study of a far more authoritative political theorist, Noam Chomsky, through videotape copies of the latter's public lectures. Audiences watch with Greg, for example, a lengthy (and textually uninterrogated) extract from a Chomsky address in which the latter narrates a shameful history of American economic and political support for the dictatorial regime in Indonesia. While Greg's political *naïveté* and material inaction is thrown into relief by an *American* character, his sister's boyfriend John, this proves an illusory irony. John has worked around the globe for the United Nations. Yet while his personal commitment and actions put Greg's posturing into sharp relief, the two men share a comparable hostility towards the global export of American popular culture, and the craven materialism both (and, it seems, Forsyth) believe this to carry in tow. John complains of this phenomenon to Greg ("the whole world buys our fantasies") in broadly comparable terms to those Greg offers to his pupils.

The corrupting effects of Scottish exposure to American cultural and ideological contagion extend beyond the level of conversational platitude, however. *Gregory's 2 Girls* bequeaths the former material embodiment, in the character of the corrupt local businessman, Fraser. The latter is Greg's erstwhile school friend, now returned to Cumbernauld after a long sojourn working in the US. Greg's innocence initially leads him to see Fraser as "not just a local boy made good: you're a fucking legend". In sharp contrast, the text from the outset presents Fraser as a cultural and ethical cuckoo in the native nest. It is his firm, Rowan Electronics, which sponsors the school's American Football team ("the first in Scotland"). Fraser's total abandonment of ethical distinction

or restraint is flagged when he actively encourages Greg to seduce his pupil, Frances. His wilful refusal to conceive of business deals as anything other than acts of free mercantilism pure and simple renders him complicit in acts of oppression prosecuted on a national scale.

The tenor of *Gregory's 2 Girls*' essentialist and alienated representation of American culture and identity in their purportedly authentic and universal respects is problematic enough. Even more perplexing, however, is the text's simultaneous implication—ostensible exhortations to direct local action not excepted—that American cultural hegemony in Scotland is as absolute as it is corrupting. It cannot be satisfactorily avoided or meaningfully contested, even where correctly identified at work, by the members of a laughably peripheral national culture. For John, “pocket-sized” Scotland is an “old, safe, dead country” cut off from the contemporary world by its fixation with the past: “all your heroes are statues”. While Greg the Scot can drop quotations from Chomsky into conversation, in a botched attempt at self-aggrandisement, John the American can casually boast in response of being taught by the man himself, while studying at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Ultimately, it appears that no amount of local self-politicisation or proselytising can change an unalterable fact of national life, namely that all genuine and enduringly meaningful loci of political authority, knowledge and experience reside well outside the boundaries of the Scottish sphere. Both the urgency and coherence of the political critique proffered by *Gregory's 2 Girls* are blunted by the fact that the film first diagnoses a national malady, and then seems to deem it incurable.

Certain contemporary reviewers of *Gregory's 2 Girls* also read the film's arch foregrounding of American cultural and economic hegemony as an “entirely intentional” commentary on a contemporary Scottish cinema “living under the shadow of *Braveheart*”.⁵³⁷ On a tourist visit to Stirling Castle, John ignorantly asks of Greg, “did Wallace and Rob Roy get along?” The latter's facetious response—“the intervening four hundred years limited any meaningful relationship, good or bad”—is at surface level a neat putdown of a well-meaning American visitor's ignorance of Scottish history. Yet in

⁵³⁷ Close, op. cit.

terms of the key films and institutional developments responsible for catalysing the mid-to-late '90s quantum expansion of Scottish feature production, it is John's question—not Greg's answer—that makes most sense. Wallace and MacGregor, *Braveheart* and *Rob Roy*, 'got along' famously in 1995/96. With less than one, not 'four hundred', intervening years between their production and international theatrical distribution, this 'relationship' was a powerfully 'meaningful' one for an infant national film industry and culture. These films simultaneously epitomised and legitimised the early success of initial Scottish efforts to attract US capital—whether solely in the form of location spend (*Braveheart*) or also in the form of production finance secured by local creative personnel (*Rob Roy*)—to the country. Moreover, key to *Rob Roy* was a deliberate, entrepreneurial commodification of local narrative and historical content for consumption by global audiences. This was, as we have seen, achieved through selective adaptation of an American generic repertoire. The period around the 1715 Jacobite Rebellion is depicted as 'tartan western'. The textual representations of the Scottish identity and past that resulted from such a process might well have formed, as Greg implies, 'bad' history, but they also helped to establish a contemporary Scottish film industrial and cultural orthodoxy deeply indebted to American cinematic precedents and exemplars. Ultimately, *Gregory's 2 Girls* understands the interaction between Scottish and American traditions and ideas within Scottish cinema in exactly the same fashion as it does their mixing in all other areas of the national sphere. The alleged ideological hegemony of the US is an impossible and intractable bind for the Scottish national sphere: regressive in all its fundamentals, yet too powerfully entrenched to contest locally with any realistic hope of success.

The analysis proposed by Forsyth in *Gregory's 2 Girls*, not to mention the commercially and culturally problematic late-'90s films discussed in this chapter, appear to refute the present work's central analytic thrust. After all, this thesis has not simply argued for the centrality of institutional and creative borrowings from American cinema within 1990s Scottish film culture. It has also proposed from the very outset that, taken as a whole, such borrowings should in retrospect be understood as an industrially and culturally progressive phenomenon. Yet, as this chapter shows, that contention would seem to fly in

the face of much contemporary evidence and commentary from Scotland during the late 1990s. Having now surveyed the decade as a whole, I want to conclude, not simply by reiterating, but also re-justifying, the methodological paradigm through which I have identified and interpreted a range of catalytic and/or representative films and institutional developments. I do this through consideration of perhaps the two most acclaimed 1990s and early-'00s Scottish films and filmmakers of all, Lynne Ramsay's *Ratcatcher* (GB/Fr, 1999) and Peter Mullan's *The Magdalene Sisters* (GB/Ire, 2001). These films indicate just how selective, essentialising and self-defeating the reading of Scottish-American cultural exchange offered by *Gregory's 2 Girls*, and suggested by a range of disheartening late-'90s developments, actually is. *Ratcatcher* and *The Magdalene Sisters* demonstrate the central thesis of the present work in action. Ramsay and Mullan's remarkable films remind us of the complexly *multifaceted*, but essentially enabling, character of local attempts to appropriate and adapt US working precedents in a bid to finally create an industrially sustainable Scottish cinema, some one hundred years after the medium's birth.

Conclusion

Scottish cinema from the '90s into the '00s

This thesis has proposed two central contentions regarding 1990s Scottish cinema. The first had to do with observation. It involved discerning the existence of, and proposing the central importance appertaining to, local adoption and adaptation of a range of institutional and individual filmmaking practices developed within American cinema. This, I have argued, was the central driving force which propelled Scottish cinema's remarkable expansion during the twentieth century's last decade. The second contention central to this thesis had more to do with interpretation, critically assessing and interrogating the hegemonic American influence observed in the first instance. The interpretative component of the present work argued that a collectively acceded-to 'Scottish American' creative and commercial agenda, dynamically successful in the first half of the '90s, proved to have rapidly diminishing returns as the decade drew towards its close.

In prosecuting such a project, however, the present work creates two central problems for itself. These are problems this conclusion aims to address. The first relates to an uncertainty of critical tone: is there not something fundamentally inconsistent about a thesis which claims to celebrate the hegemony of US cinematic influence within 1990s Scottish cinema, but then argues that such hegemony proved less industrially and culturally productive the longer the '90s wore on? The second relates to a sense of historical and cultural (dis)continuity. Does not the argument that American influence *did* dominate 1990s Scottish cinema but was exhausted by that decade's end tend towards the ahistoric, apprehending the decade in question as a episode entirely out of local film cultural character, possessing no discernible links to what went before or what transpired after within Scottish film culture?

This latter problem is a particularly acute one. For, if definitions of Scottish cinema as a local subset of wider European creative traditions and industrial structures are unconvincing when applied to the events and initiatives of the 1990s, they do seem much

more appropriate to what followed in the first half of the '00s. During the early twenty-first century, local producers and funding institutions moved away from their prior, overriding attempt to access the riches of the British metropolis and Beverly Hills. They tried instead to establish working relationships with a range of small European counterparts. For instance, *The Magdalene Sisters* (Peter Mullan, GB/Ire, 2001) and *Blind Flight* (John Furse, GB/Ire, 2003) represented the first major feature collaborations between Scottish and Irish production personnel and capital. Yet more audaciously, the most dynamic local independent of the early '00s, Glasgow-based Sigma Films (producer Gillian Berrie and writer/director David Mackenzie) forged an extended working relationship with perhaps the most internationally feted European independent of the 1990s, Denmark's Zentropa. This partnership, drawing together a loose constellation of Northern European talent, production capital and resources, was responsible for a range of Scottish-Scandinavian co-productions: *The Last Great Wilderness* (David Mackenzie, GB/Den, 2002), *Skagerrak* (Søren Kragh-Jacobsen, Den/Swe/Gb/Sp/Ger/Fr/Swi, 2003), *Wilbur Wants to Kill Himself* (Lone Scherfig, Den/GB/Swe/Fr, 2002), and most recently, *Red Road* (Andrea Arnold, GB/Den, 2006).

Moreover, the direction in which collective Scottish creative interests and allegiances shifted in the early '00s mirrored the Continental reorientation of local industrial awareness and aspiration noted directly above. The 'ideal type' of 1990s Scottish filmmaker was one who aimed to adapt international generic and aesthetic precedent in the pursuit of mainstream commercial success. In contrast, the most prolific, prominent local directors of the '00s have tended to cast themselves in the classic European auteur mould. Post-2000, Scottish filmmakers have aimed increasingly to produce feature work distinguished by varying combinations of autobiographical content, exploration of psychological interiority, formal innovation and radical political stance: Kenny Glennan—*Gas Attack* (GB, 2001), Yasmin (Ger/GB, 2004)—Richard Jobson—*16 Years of Alcohol* (GB, 2003), *A Woman in Winter* (GB, 2005)—May Miles Thomas—*One Life Stand* (GB, 2000), *Solid Air* (GB, 2003)—David Mackenzie—*The Last Great Wilderness*, *Young Adam* (GB/Fr, 2003)—Peter Mullan—*The Magdalene Sisters*—Lynne Ramsay—*Morvern Callar* (GB, 2002); this list is not exhaustive.

It is within this changing recent context that this conclusion considers the two best-known and critically celebrated Scottish films spanning the transition from the '90s to the '00s: *Ratcatcher* (Lynne Ramsay, GB/Fr, 1999) and *The Magdalene Sisters*. These films and their makers are identified routinely by critics as flag-bearers for a nascent Scottish-European cinema. By contrast, what I seek to do here is to present these films in a distinctive way, one consistent with the arguments put forward in this thesis, as complex and progressive local engagements with American cinematic precedent and influence. Firstly, I do this in order to restate the point about US hegemony within 1990s Scottish film culture (so pervasive that it can be found at work even in what seem like the most unlikely texts). Secondly, I do this in order to emphasise that my identification of US hegemony's progressive impact as profoundly time-bound is not inconsistent with my overarching judgement, all things considered, of its fundamentally positive role during the 1990s (right to the very end of the period, engagement with that hegemony proves a creatively, commercially and ideologically productive strategy for certain local filmmakers). Thirdly, I do this because it shows how important it is to acknowledge and understand Scottish cinema's American decade. That period constituted in pragmatic terms the facilitating platform upon which a range of more critically sympathetic (at least within received critical orthodoxies) projects and filmmakers have emerged in the '00s. In this way I present my preferred historical-analytical account of the 1990s as appropriate to the period it considered and of relevance to examination of later developments.

Field of Dreams: Ratcatcher

At first sight, Lynne Ramsay and *Ratcatcher* would appear unpromising material with which to conclude an analysis that has consistently argued both the material centrality and the ultimately progressive impact of American influences within 1990s Scottish cinema. From the very moment of *Ratcatcher*'s domestic theatrical release, the critical orthodoxy surrounding this film and filmmaker has stressed their perceived 'Europeanness'. For Tony McKibbin, this film shows that "in the best of Scottish cinema,

the European influence is never far away".⁵³⁸ Duncan Petrie argues that "Ramsay's cinema is squarely in the traditions of the European art film".⁵³⁹ Ramsay herself argued at the time of *Ratcatcher*'s UK cinema run that, "if I come from any tradition, it's a European cinema as opposed to an American one".⁵⁴⁰ The year previous, she had noted that her then-unfinished film saw her "chasing the European art-house market".⁵⁴¹ Most specifically of all, the director identified the final scene of Robert Bresson's *Mouchette* (Fr, 1966) as "one of my most memorable moments"⁵⁴² in cinema. That film's narrative depicts a small community's gradual ostracisation of an adolescent. *Mouchette*'s climax, a wordless sequence (which may or may not be fantasy) playing out the death of this central protagonist by drowning set very close precedents indeed for *Ratcatcher*. The exhaustive autodidacticism of *Ratcatcher*'s borrowings from canonic European art cinema (Vigo and Tarkovsky along with Bresson, for example) impressed contemporary commentators who praised the referential abilities of a young director who "has seen every art film that she should have".⁵⁴³

Yet despite such ostensibly problematic qualifications, *Ratcatcher* offers a significant reference point for readings which stress the hegemonic and fundamentally progressive nature of American influences at work within 1990s Scottish cinema. The complex influence of US cinematic precedents in *Ratcatcher*, active in tandem with more frequently acknowledged European equivalents, made this a text which successfully negotiated the often seemingly contradictory demand for an industrially secure, internationally successful national cinema simultaneously capable of making progressive interventions within its domestic cultural sphere.

⁵³⁸ Tony McKibbin, 'Retouching the Real: Lynne Ramsay's *Ratcatcher*', in *Cencrastus*, n. 65 (2000), pg. 39.

⁵³⁹ Duncan Petrie, *Contemporary Scottish Fictions: Film, Television and the Novel* (Edinburgh: EUP, 2004), pg. 104.

⁵⁴⁰ Quoted in Liese Spencer, 'What are you looking at? Interview with Lynne Ramsay', in *Sight & Sound*, Vol. 9. 10 (Oct 1999), pg. 17.

⁵⁴¹ Quoted in Nick James, 'Medium Cool', in *Sight & Sound*, Vol. 8. 8 (Aug 1998), pg. 15.

⁵⁴² Lynne Ramsay, 'Words and pictures', @

<http://www.filmunlimited.co.uk/100filmmoments/story/0.4135.131762.00.html> <accessed 21/5/01>

⁵⁴³ Harlan Kennedy, 'Ratcatcher', in *Film Comment*, Vol. 36. 1 (Jan/Feb 2000), pg. 7.

Set in inner city Glasgow during a dustbinmen's strike of 1973, *Ratcatcher* juxtaposes historical diegesis with fictional narrative content, focusing on the actions and subjective state of its central character, James, a pre-pubescent boy. Both the film's historical setting and the narrative which unfolds within it incorporate memories from Ramsay's own childhood.⁵⁴⁴ James and his family live in a rapidly degenerating inner city housing scheme. They fervently wish to be re-housed in one of the many new estates and towns that were being built on the semi-rural outskirts of Glasgow from the 1950s onwards, a direct central and local governmental response to endemic urban overcrowding and deprivation. Equally central to *Ratcatcher*'s narrative is James' involvement in the accidental death of Ryan, the young son of a neighbouring family. A game played by the two boys at the edge of a local canal gets out of hand. James pushes Ryan into the water, and the latter drowns. At three subsequent points in the film, James briefly escapes from the dual pressures of urban squalor and private guilt, to roam an idyllic but unfinished public housing scheme of the kind he hopes he and his family will be removed to by the municipal authorities. Ultimately, however, bureaucratic intransigence and individual remorse conspire to thwart this wish. The film's final scenes are purposefully ambiguous, because their diegetic coding is unclear. James *appears* to commit suicide by jumping into the same canal in which Ryan earlier drowned. Underwater shots of the 'dying' boy are then intercut with images of James and his family arriving at one of the new homes he earlier visited. This climactic sequence can be interpreted in a number of ways: as part of James' overarching dream, the boy's dying hallucination or an actual, unexpectedly optimistic narrative epilogue.⁵⁴⁵

Of specific relevance to the central argument proposed by this thesis is *Ratcatcher*'s premeditated use of iconography associated with the Western genre. As we shall see, this is done in order to represent and interrogate James's interaction with the massive state-directed programme of urban relocation that was for many a central component of post-WWII Scottish experience. James makes three visits to the same partially constructed

⁵⁴⁴ See Lynne Ramsay, *Ratcatcher: original screenplay* (London: Faber & Faber, 1999), pg. viii.

⁵⁴⁵ Ramsay discusses her "really ambiguous approach" to the ending of *Ratcatcher* in Eileen Elsey, 'Herstories: Narrative and Gender - Lynne Ramsay in conversation', in *Vertigo*, Vol. 2. 4 (Spring 2003), pp. 14-15.

new housing estate on the rural fringes of Glasgow. The first two visits are solitary and clearly coded as actual. The status of the third and final one, made with his entire family as they remove to a new home in the film's climactic sequence, is far more ambiguous, as noted above. These three sequences form an interlocking thematic and stylistic centrepiece to Ramsay's film. On James' first visit to the new scheme, this environment is deliberately presented through the boy's eyes as a utopian playground. Construction tools and scaffolding form conveniently unsupervised toys and climbing frames. Unfinished houses lacking door locks or window panes become magical playpens. Here, a child can instantaneously travel from all the civilised comforts of urban modernity (symbolised by a pristine, unused enamelled bath, just the kind of basic amenity James' dilapidated inner city home is earlier shown to lack) to rural Arcadia, frolicking in seemingly endless fields of ripe wheat, with no more than a single bound through an empty window frame.

The estate seems to offer the possibility of a paneless/painless new communal habitat for the traumatised boy. This is so not only because of the clear contrast it forms with the socially and historically specific lived experience of James and his family. The attraction of the estate and surrounding fields for James involves their apparently perfect dissociation from *any* concrete form of lived experience whatsoever, "an abstraction "looking for validation by human occupancy".⁵⁴⁶ As Ramsay herself notes of the cornfield, "it could have been a patch of grass... but in his mind it's Utopia, it's Heaven, it's the most beautiful thing he's ever seen".⁵⁴⁷ The vascular system of modernity does not yet incorporate the scheme. The bath in which James lies, like the exteriors and interiors of all the buildings more generally, is weirdly cocooned by an inorganic placenta of plastic sheeting; the toilet bowl into which he urinates is as yet unconnected to water or sewage systems (a particularly significant fact, given the film's repeated association of water with physical corruption and death). At the time of *Ratcatcher*'s domestic theatrical release, Ramsay repeatedly insisted that neither she nor her debut feature be reductively defined in terms of nationality and locality: "I don't want to become the person who

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid, pg. 9.

⁵⁴⁷ Quoted in Neil Cooper, 'Perfect Vision: Interview with Lynne Ramsay', in *Product*, n. 5 (Winter 2000/01), pg. 25.

makes films about 'gritty Glasgow'. I don't want to be called the next Scottish filmmaker".⁵⁴⁸ Accordingly, admiring critical notices of *Ratcatcher* typically praised the capacity of its maker to transfigure locally specific individual and national histories, "a particular time and place", into narratives and images possessing "a poetic and universal resonance."⁵⁴⁹ Yet *Ratcatcher* emphatically does *not* constitute a culturally one-sided, if undeniably accomplished, process of textual deracination, and it is the film's Classical American, rather than its European Art borrowings, that ensure this is so.

The most clear-cut manifestation of *Ratcatcher*'s keynote transfiguration and universalisation of the local is the way in which the fields adjacent to the new estate are presented. Playing in an unfinished kitchen during his first visit, James is suddenly transfixed by the otherworldly glow emanating from the sea of wheat visible through the room's glassless window. A bravura slow track follows him through the empty window frame into fields that are as much Elysian as they are staple agricultural. Vitality, Ramsay's explicit iconographic and mythic reference point for the construction of this sequence was an American one:

James' first visit to this empty house is also probably the first time he's seen a field, so I wanted to give this field a wide-open, almost Midwestern American feel.⁵⁵⁰

Like so many of her local contemporaries, Ramsay here deliberately cross-fertilises the local and the universal, modern Scottish history viewed through American cinematic and mythological templates. The pre-meditated quality of this moment is highlighted by the fact that it represents a formally over-determined moment within the film. Alwin Kuchler, Ramsay's regular cinematographer, commented on the director's working preference for minimal camera movement within individual shots and scenes of *Ratcatcher*. Where significant camera movement does take place, it generally does so discreetly, through the use of handheld equipment rather than more technically complex

⁵⁴⁸ Quoted in op. cit., pg. 17.

⁵⁴⁹ Anthony Quinn, 'Review: *Ratcatcher*', in *The Independent*, (12/11/99), Review section, pg. 11.

⁵⁵⁰ Quoted in Spencer, op. cit., pg. 17.

and ostentatious tracking or panning effects. Yet as Kuchler notes, the one glaring exception to this general rule is the sequence just discussed:

There's a straightforward track onto a window through which the boy first sees a field... because there are so few of these moves in the film, that one shot gains power – you're not expecting it... you feel you're being drawn out, or that you're flying with the boy through the window.⁵⁵¹

This aesthetically excessive moment expressly aims to intensify audience identification with James' euphoric subjective state. Moreover, the very local contours of the political and social discourses and experiences that underlie both the creation of the new scheme and James' initial ecstatic reaction to it are here rendered more immediately legible for external audiences, through their 'framing' within pre-existing American cinematic and mythological 'windows'. This is the plenitude of the 'new frontier' and the heroism of those pioneering individuals and families who make the courageous leap of faith to settle it. When James returns to the estate on his second visit, however, the weather has changed from idyllic sunshine to rain; the window of the house he previously played in has been glassed over. The camera position from which both boy and audience previously tracked through to the fields beyond is replicated; James, however, is now placed on the exterior of the house, wistfully looking in through the glass. The earlier communion between audience point of view and James' subjective euphoria is forcibly severed. The boy's psychic vulnerability and material inability to transcend his traumatised social background and experiences is foregrounded. In Ramsay's own words, the point of this stark formal rhyme is that it "shows [James'] loss of innocence."⁵⁵²

Part of *Ratcatcher*'s considerable achievement is that the film is also able to 'show' a parallel historic and national 'loss of innocence', reifying it into a universally accessible cinematic *mythos* without distortion or deracination. Many Scottish commentators

⁵⁵¹ Quoted in Graham Rae, 'Striking gold in Glasgow's trash-strewn streets', in *American Cinematographer*, Vol. 81. 4 (Apr 2000), pp. 14-15.

⁵⁵² Quoted in Spencer, op. cit., pg. 19.

convincingly read *Ratcatcher* in just such terms. They saw the film as a retrospective, metaphoric commentary on the blighted hopes placed in the post-WWII State's massive urban relocation programme, and the collective disillusion that ultimately resulted from it. As one critic noted after re-viewing *Gregory's Girl* with the benefit of two decades' worth of hindsight, the young Gregory's Cumbernauld—the key material and symbolic embodiment of the Scottish New Town dream—now appears like “Eden before the Fall... you search in vain for... some glimmer of evidence that this place could turn into dirty realist Scotland”.⁵⁵³ Indeed, through association with their respective child and child-like protagonists, both *Ratcatcher* and *Gregory's 2 Girls* understand the national hopes attached to the New Town dream as fatally naïve. The new estates James views as a panacea for all kinds of social and psychical traumas from the vantage point of 1973 are the self-consciously Arcadian setting for *Gregory's Girl* in 1980. As Forsyth noted two decades later, the New Town dream had since lost the allure it once possessed for so many:

New Towns were part of the culture of Scotland in the Seventies, and we were happy to put ourselves in the hands of town planners. I don't think you could get away with it now.⁵⁵⁴

Andrew O'Hagan echoed this view:

James' changing life can seem to refer to some larger change... in the country beyond: the tenement life is coming to an end... [communities moved] to the Green Belt outside Glasgow – a place like Cumbernauld or East Kilbride... The new white houses and their inside toilets: the stuff young dreams are made of. And this was a hope for many families – to escape over the fields to

⁵⁵³ Tom Lappin, 'Life was Sweet', in *Scotland on Sunday*, (17/5/98), *Spectrum* section, pg. 13.

⁵⁵⁴ Forsyth quoted in Eddie Gibb, 'What's it called?', in *The Sunday Herald*, (28/2/99), (Magazine section), pg. 18.

somewhere clean, new and out of the dark. Ramsay's film is the first to put that amazing bit of life on screen.⁵⁵⁵

The dialectical relationship between domestic and international audience address present in *Ratcatcher*'s final scene gives credence to such optimistic local readings. James' dream, dying fantasy or eventual escape places his family trooping in single file through the fields, towards the new estate he earlier visited alone, each carrying a single item of household furniture. This sequence is at once a moment of universalised panegyric and of locally specific, socio-historical commentary.

Crucially for the purposes of this work's preferred reading of 1990s Scottish cinema, the American cinematic reference that makes the text legible for, and marketable to, external audiences actually facilitates the depth and resonance of the politicised critique accessed by some domestic viewers. The epic and mythic qualities attached to the US-derived pioneer myth constructs vivid linkages with the *mentalité* of past generations of the Scottish national community. They acknowledge the vertiginous scale of the hopes invested by government planners and urban communities alike in mass relocation as a panacea for a range of entrenched social ills. The articulation of such locally specific hopes and beliefs through the epic filter of American cinematic mythology also creates a telling sense of retrospective incongruity: how many 'new frontiers' are to be discovered through an exodus of little more than ten or twenty miles? *Ratcatcher*'s invocation of the Western myth articulates a nuanced awareness of the misplaced faith placed in the New Towns. They themselves in turn became new *loci* of social deprivation, particularly drug-related, during the 1980s and 1990s. Emma Wilson reads *Ratcatcher* through a psychoanalytic framework, suggesting that "the film reflects in its tempo, structure and recurring motifs, the delayed and disrupted temporality of responses to trauma".⁵⁵⁶ Ramsay's use of the Western archetype allows the 'trauma' which the film explores to be apprehended as simultaneously collective and historical, individual and psychological.

⁵⁵⁵ Andrew O'Hagan, 'This is my film of the year', in *The Daily Telegraph*, (12/11/99), pg. 25. My insert.

⁵⁵⁶ Emma Wilson, *Cinema's Missing Children* (London: Wallflower, 2003), pg. 115.

Ratcatcher therefore illustrates the possibility of progressively hybrid relations between the cultural traditions of US and Scottish cinemas. It is just such a position which the present work has consistently outlined during its industrial, institutional and textual survey of 1990s Scottish cinema. Moreover, in doing so, it does little more than echo and duly acknowledge, nearly a decade on, the basic insight which galvanised the activities of so many individual filmmakers and film workers during the period. Together, they created an infant, but increasingly sustainable and internationally recognised, Scottish national cinema. It is along just such lines that Deborah Orr argues of *Ratcatcher* that the film,

Is actually the flipside of the new beginning we wanted so much to believe in when it was spread out before us in *Gregory's Girl*, with its neat, polite New Town children stretching up their hands in gleaming classrooms... Ramsay... offer[s] a corrective to this, reacting back to the childhoods they never saw represented and setting the record straight. It was Ramsay's, not Forsyth's, foundations that Thatcherism was built on; Ramsay's, not Forsyth's, foundations that Blairism seeks to re-clad, like so many of the brand-new slums of the 1970s have been re-clad.⁵⁵⁷

This thesis has narrated an analogous local story of 'new beginning' to that discerned by Orr. Despite the profundity and far-reaching nature of the collective historical experience *Ratcatcher* testifies to, such lived local stories were almost completely ignored or obscured in British, American and other international cinematic constructions of 'Scotland' until the very last years of the century of cinema. By and large, as Orr points out, "no-one was charting our new life for us".⁵⁵⁸ The 'new beginning' I have tried to narrate here was that of a sustainable indigenous film industry and culture which took as a central aim the 'charting' of local 'lives' past and present. This story of 1990s Scottish

⁵⁵⁷ Deborah Orr, 'Young, Gifted and Scottish', in *The Independent on Sunday*, (31/10/99), *Review* section, pg. 2.

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid.

cinema's expansion and consolidation matters, as *Ratcatcher* shows, because at its most creatively accomplished and culturally engaged, that cinema made an important and progressive intervention within contemporary debates around national society, history and identity. Moreover, the considerable material advances made during the 1990s have created the long term conditions which will enable subsequent filmmakers to intervene similarly in the future. Consideration of Peter Mullan's *The Magdalene Sisters* not only reiterates that point; it also indicates the difficulty but ultimate necessity of acknowledging it properly.

Convents or Cowboys? The Magdalene Sisters

In many ways the story of 1990s Irish cinema ran in close parallel to that of its Scottish counterpart.⁵⁵⁹ As in Scotland, Irish feature production between the mid 1980s and early '90s was fragmentary in the extreme. As late as 1994, Ireland and Scotland were identified by one distinguished critic as 'dark corners'⁵⁶⁰ of Anglophone and European cinemas. Significant proportions of both cinemas during that time were financed through very low levels of indigenous public subsidy supporting formally experimental and/or politically radical 'Celtic' art features. Yet from the early '90s Irish cinema, like its Scottish cousin, expanded with a rapidity and to an extent remarkable and unforeseen. Looking back on the '90s Kevin Rockett argued, in terms that could be transposed wholesale to Scotland over the same period, that it was "hard to imagine from the vantage point of 2003 how complete the transformation of the institutional and cultural

⁵⁵⁹ For a wider comparative discussion of Irish and Scottish cinemas, see see Jonathan Murray, 'Sibling Rivalry? Contemporary Scottish and Irish Cinemas', in Liam McIlvanney and Ray Ryan (eds.), *Ireland and Scotland: Culture and Society, 1707-2000* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2005), pp. 144-163.

⁵⁶⁰ See, for example, John Hill, 'Introduction', in Hill, Martin McLoone & Paul Hainsworth (eds.), *Border Crossing: Film in Ireland, Britain and Europe* (London/Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies/University of Ulster/BFI, 1994), pg. 3.

landscapes for film in Ireland has been.”⁵⁶¹ As in Scotland, the 1990s saw a far greater number of indigenous Irish features produced (76) than at any other time in the latter country’s cinema history.⁵⁶²

The first *bona fide* Scottish/Irish feature co-production, *The Magdalene Sisters* proved something of an apotheosis for the post-1990 industrial advances made on either side of the Irish Sea.⁵⁶³ This was so firstly in commercial terms. In Ireland, the film passed the €1 m mark at the domestic box office by the end of November 2002, and became the highest-earning domestic film of the year. *Magdalene Sisters* had taken £1.84 m at the British box office by the end of March 2003, after only a few weeks on theatrical release.⁵⁶⁴ Moreover, local audiences’ intense interest in *The Magdalene Sisters* was in part provoked by the film’s status as international critical *succès d’estime*, winner of the Golden Lion award for Best Film at the 2002 Venice Film Festival.

Yet if *The Magdalene Sisters* acts as a synecdoche for the substantial Scottish and Irish film industrial advances of the 1990s, the same film also illustrates the depth of critical unease and debate which such material achievements generated within both nations. Inside post-1990 Irish film culture—again, as with Scotland in the same period—the perceived ‘problem’ of prevalent American cinematic influence, limiting local

⁵⁶¹ Kevin Rockett, ‘Introduction’, in Rockett, *Ten Years After: the Irish Film Board 1993 – 2003* (Galway: Irish Film Board, 2003), pg. viii.

⁵⁶² See Ibid.

⁵⁶³ For a detailed account of the film’s co-production history, see Murray, ‘Sibling Rivalry?’, op. cit.

⁵⁶⁴ UK Box office returns quoted @ www.filmcouncil.org.uk/filmindustry/?p=UKBOstats <accessed 6/4/03>; Irish returns quoted in Ted Sheehy, ‘*The Magdalene Sisters* makes a deep impression’, @ www.Screendaily.com <accessed 28/11/02>.

filmmakers to “at best offer[ing] a type of Hollywood regionalism”⁵⁶⁵, became something of a critical truism. Irish commentators, like their Scottish counterparts, consistently privileged the ideal type of “counter-Hollywood cinema”⁵⁶⁶ equated with the European Art tradition. Consequently stern warnings about “the futility of applying... Californian templates... its style of filmmaking, without modification to local cultures”⁵⁶⁷ became a central element of Scottish and Irish film critical cultures alike over the period this thesis has examined. Tellingly in this regard, a recurrent keynote to rapturous British and Irish critical notices of *The Magdalene Sisters* was an overblown assertion of the film’s un- or non-American-ness, “point[ing] Scottish cinema in an inspiring new direction that owes more to popular European cinema than to... America”.⁵⁶⁸ Similarly, for the minority disappointed local observers, the problem with Mullan’s film was that it was *too* American. Fintan O’Toole, for example, argued that *The Magdalene Sisters* illustrated the self-imposed, smothering political and aesthetic constraints which necessarily defined a Celtic-American national cinema:

[*The Magdalene Sisters*] worked so well in Ireland [because]... it does belong in a familiar genre: the Hollywood prison drama... Particularly in a small and relatively intimate society... the conventions of a familiar genre dull the pain a little.⁵⁶⁹

⁵⁶⁵ Kevin Rockett, ‘Irish Cinema: The National in the International’, in *Cineaste*, Vol. XXIV n. 2-3 (1999), pg. 25.

⁵⁶⁶ Susan Hayward, *Cinema Studies: The Key Concepts 2nd Edition* (London: Routledge, 2001), pg. 17.

⁵⁶⁷ Luke Gibbons, ‘The Esperanto of the Eye?’, in *Film Ireland*, n. 55 (October/November 1996), pg. 20.

⁵⁶⁸ Hannah McGill, ‘The bigger picture’, in *The Herald*, (8/3/03), pg. 18.

⁵⁶⁹ Fintan O’Toole, ‘The sisters of no mercy’, in *The Observer*, (16/2/03), Review section, pg. 6. My insert.

Similarly, Tom Dunne explained what he saw as the same film's "failure to deal adequately with the core question of the social and theological attitudes to sexuality that underpinned the Magdalen system" in terms of its "reli[ance]... on well-tried cinematic formulae... a mixture of 'buddy movie' and 'prison movie'... the film degenerates finally into a banal take-off of *The Great Escape*".⁵⁷⁰

Yet in keeping with the analytical approach employed throughout this thesis, it can be argued that *The Magdalene Sisters*' judicious use of a number of American cinematic influences and reference points demonstrates anything but the essentially pernicious nature of American popular culture's central influence within modern Irish and Scottish national cultures and cinemas. Rather, as in *Ratcatcher*, *Magdalene Sisters*' American intertext works in ways that proved commercially entrepreneurial internationally speaking, and politically radical domestically so. On one hand, US cinematic influences and reference points grant both the text and the highly specific historical and cultural milieu it depicts a degree of cross-cultural legibility, and therefore marketability. On the other, the mutually supportive existence and influence of parallel, oppressive idealisations of Catholic feminine identities within distinctive Irish and American national spheres is highlighted deliberately in Mullan's film. This creates a complex acknowledgement and exploration of a range of historical-cultural reasons for, and domestic complicity in, the existence of the Magdalene asylums. The laundries and the associated discourses of gender, denominational and national identity from which they

⁵⁷⁰ Tom Dunne, 'Penitents', in *Dublin Review*, n. 9 (Winter 2002/03), pg. 75.

drew social legitimation are neither mystified nor reified into an inexplicably exclusive, essentialised Irish neurosis.

Shot on location in Southwest Scotland utilising a disused Benedictine convent in the town of Dumfries, *The Magdalene Sisters*' narrative is set in County Dublin between 1964 and '68. The film explores a traumatic aspect of modern Irish history, the incarceration of women deemed 'morally lax' by their families and/or wider communities in laundries run by female religious orders within the Roman Catholic Church. Unmarried mothers, sexually active single women and rape victims amongst others were effectively imprisoned for their 'crimes'. These unfortunates were exploited as unpaid labour, physically and psychically brutalised for the duration of a sentence whose length was deliberately unspecified, on occasion ending only with the victim's death. Widely quoted estimates state that some 30 000 women passed through the Magdalene Laundry system before the last asylum closed its doors in 1996.⁵⁷¹

The Magdalene Sisters was initially inspired by, and based later closely upon, extensive video testimonies recorded for a range of television documentaries on the Magdalene laundries. Peter Mullan structured his script around the representative original 'crimes' and subsequent imprisonment of four actual victims of that system. These he transposed to a central quartet of fictional teenage characters in the finished film.⁵⁷² The opening sequences of *Magdalene Sisters* provide short back-stories for three of the main characters' respective incarcerations. Margaret's family, acting on the advice of their

⁵⁷¹ See O'Toole, op. cit.

⁵⁷² See the director's comments in Robert McMillen, 'A life of misery' in *The Irish News*, (3/1/03), pg. 21.

priest, send her away after she is raped by a cousin during a family wedding; Rose is ostracised by her parents after giving birth to a child outside of wedlock; Bernadette is expelled from the orphanage where she lives simply for being 'too pretty', and therefore a temptation to local men. The three are for four years trapped in a laundry run by the sadistic Sister Bridget, exploited as unpaid labour, physically and psychologically maltreated throughout. Eventually, Margaret's brother secures his sister's release; Bernadette and Rose make a forcible and successful escape. End titles sketch the basic trajectories of the characters' subsequent lives.

As with *Ratcatcher*, a particularly notable aspect of *The Magdalene Sisters* is the attempt made by the film to commodify its locally specific, traumatic subject matter for international markets. This it does through extensive adoption of generic precedent drawn from Classical Hollywood. In promotional interviews, Peter Mullan freely acknowledged that *The Magdalene Sisters* was at one level a Celtic transposition of the American prison movie, "in the tradition of [*One Flew Over the*] *Cuckoo's Nest* (Milos Forman, USA, 1975) and [*The*] *Shawshank [Redemption]* (Frank Darabont, USA, 1994) – an old-fashioned drama."⁵⁷³ While narrative events and character experiences are as a matter of principle drawn from documentary testimony, they are also codified systematically into generic archetypes, particularly in *The Magdalene Sisters*' early stages. The laundry is part-constructed as a local variant upon the universal narrative trope of corrupt prison and/or centre of detention. Its inmates abruptly disappear or are summarily removed from their former homes in unmarked cars at break of dawn; Sister Bridget is the sadistic Head

⁵⁷³ Quoted in Cameron Simpson, 'Mullan welcomes "humble" Catholic opinion', in *The Herald*, (17/2/03), pg. 2.

Warden, taunting the central trio with the punitive terms of their sentence; victims are institutionally stripped of their given names and personal histories (Rose becomes not a number, but 'Patricia'); minor characters quickly instigate the prison movie's standard generic sub-plots, themes and character types, such as the difficulty but necessity of escape (Oona O'Connor) and the decrepit or psychically broken collaborator (Kate and Oona respectively).

The Magdalene Sisters' keynote acknowledgement and appropriation of American cinematic precedent also extends beyond such generic self-labeling for market purposes, also encompassing a radical reading of modern Irish history and identity. Discussion of a key sequence from the film, a screening for the laundry inmates of the Hollywood film *The Bells of St Mary's* (Leo McCarey, USA, 1945), indicates the extent to which this is so. Towards the end of *The Magdalene Sisters* the laundry inmates are given a brief respite from their backbreaking labours on Christmas Day. Before the assembled internees and a smattering of local religious and business dignitaries, Sister Bridget confesses "a secret love... since I have been 13 years old, I have been in love with the films". This is a prelude to an unaccustomed 'treat', the screening of a surprise movie. The film in question, chosen by an attending prelate, is the saccharine *The Bells of St Mary's*. In that film, Bing Crosby and Ingrid Bergman play a worldly priest and devout nun at loggerheads over the running of a parochial school threatened by closure, but not so preoccupied thus that they cannot save dilapidated premises and vulnerable young souls therein housed alike. The bitterly ironic contrast between beatific American fiction of Catholic institutional charity and horrific Irish experience of the same phenomenon is

obvious to fictionalised inmates and cinema audiences alike. Oblivious to cultural incongruity and personal hypocrisy, Bridget weeps at Sister Benedict (Bergman)'s onscreen plea to God to "help me see Thy Holy Will in all things." Intercut shared reaction shots of Rose, Margaret and Bernadette reveal their despairing alienation from their local personal and external popular cultural persecutors.

On first viewing it seems that the overweening influence and attraction of American cinema has ensured that even if the laundry's physical torture has momentarily ceased, its psychological equivalent proceeds unabated. Alexander Walker, for example, praised *The Magdalene Sisters* for underscoring the material existence and importance of "Hollywood collu[sion] in the promotion of the inviolate sanctity of priests and nuns"⁵⁷⁴ within mid-twentieth century Irish society. Sr Bridget's position of power, and her abuse of it through acquiescence in authoritarian discourses bolstered by hypocritical claims of denominational sanctity and sexual purity, is both emphasised and ridiculed in this sequence through her incongruous equation with a fictional American analogue. Indeed, Bridget confesses in her introduction to *Bells of St Mary's* that she does not 'love' just any kind of film, but that American genre *par excellence*, the Western, above all. As she recalls "the look on my dear mother's face the day I told her that if I didn't get into the convent and give my life to God, then I'd be a cowboy instead", it is difficult to resist the all too easy inference that the foreign popular cultural milieu Sr Bridget left behind (American cinema and national mythology) forms the Rock on which is built the repressive ideology of the domestic Church and institutional Catholicism she subsequently embraced. Such a reading of course invites a reiteration of the local critical

⁵⁷⁴ Alexander Walker, 'Lost in schmaltzy limbo', in *London Evening Standard*, (20/2/03), pg. 46.

orthodoxy this thesis has devoted much of its energies to arguing against, namely, a received diametrical opposition between caricatured visions of regressive American cinematic and popular cultural incursion and the recently emergent Celtic-European cinemas (embodied by a text like *Magdalene Sisters*) which exist to provide an ideological corrective to the popular cultural oppression traditionally imposed from across the Atlantic. However, *The Magdalene Sisters* does not present the overweening influence of American culture and ideology as an exclusive, originary or predominant legitimating source for Sr Bridget's status as a willing and energetic tool of local institutionalised oppression.

When studied through the analytic method deployed in this thesis, the *Bells of St Mary's* sequence (indeed, *The Magdalene Sisters* as a whole) opens up to a far more dialectical understanding of the historic relationship between local (Scottish, Irish) and international (American) national cultures and cinemas. That reading is dependent upon a revisionist rejection of certain received terms structuring contemporary Scottish and Irish debate on the industrial and national-cultural consequences of contemporary American cinematic influence. The reactionary local impact of the *Bells of St Mary's*, and that of the wider Classical Hollywood Catholic cycle for which it is a synecdoche, are neither simply nor solely the product of intrinsically reactionary qualities to be ascribed to either thus individual film text or to the national culture and film industry which produced it. Rather, it is a particular type of indigenous appropriation, rather than external imposition, of American cinematic tradition which generates what *Magdalene Sisters* understands as a material reactionary consequence. *Bells* is specifically chosen and approved by the local

Archbishop and screened on projection equipment donated, as Sister Bridget informs the girls, by “Mr Laneghan, one of Dublin’s most respected businessmen”. The repressive exercise of material and cultural authority by representatives of native institutional and economic capital legitimates the inmates’ incarceration and demonisation *in tandem* with cinematic discourses of Catholic femininity that in national cultural terms are parachuted in from without.

There are, therefore, severe limitations to readings of *The Magdalene Sisters*, or of contemporary Scottish or Irish cinemas more generally, that make exclusive or predominant emphasis upon the idea of one-dimensional local ‘colonisation’ at the hands of a commercially and industrially dominant American cinema. By contrast, *The Magdalene Sisters* simultaneously acknowledges, yet also seeks to harness for progressive ends, the enduring centrality of American cinema as a refractive lens through which shared identity and experience on both sides of the Irish Sea have often been self-conceptualised. Through *Magdalene Sisters*’ careful foregrounding of the interlocking hegemonies of institutional Catholicism and American popular culture at work in the laundries, a multifaceted reading of subaltern local histories and identities emerges. This reading is one structured by the vital understanding that the differential allocation of political, economic and cultural capital inside colonised societies is administered *within*, as well as across, national borders. Within this latter reading, the textual prominence accorded to *The Bells of St Mary’s* and that film’s reactionary, desexualised discourse of Catholic femininity does not connote Irish culture’s repressive subjugation by a more powerful American Other as a self-sufficient and hermetic historical phenomenon.

Rather, the sequence in question creates a deliberate formal and thematic parallel with the equally disturbing spectacle of misogynist communal interpellation by indigenous, pre-cinematic popular cultural tradition presented in *The Magdalene Sisters*' much-remarked upon opening scene. Here, a priest sings the traditional ballad 'The Well Below the Valley' at the family wedding during which Margaret is 'disgraced' by her rape. 'Well' is one of the texts (n. 21) collected in the foundational work of British Ballad Studies, F. J. Child's edited collection *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (5 volumes, 1882-98). It is a folk re-telling of the story of Christ and the Woman of Samaria (*John*, ch. 4 v. 1-42). The ballad text in all its variants narrates the meeting between a male stranger and a woman at a well; the former begs a drink from the latter. It engages with just the kinds of patriarchially sanctioned sexual and/or familial abuse of women that are about to disrupt Margaret's life with abrupt violence: incest ("For six young children you had born/...There's two of them by your Uncle Dan") and infanticide ("There's two buried 'neath the stable door").⁵⁷⁵ The imaginary male stranger's pitiless reaction to, and prediction of, the woman's blameless damnation ("You'll be seven years a-ringing the bell/You'll be seven more burning in hell") structures and anticipates those of the material male authority figure performing the ballad, the local priest. It is he who both advises Margaret's family that she should be removed to the Laundry and transports her there himself. Finally, the woman at the well's combative response to the stranger ("I'll be seven years a-ringing the bell/But the lord above may save my soul/From burning in hell") is equally significant. It articulates the logic of female salvation through traumatic penitence for the 'sin' of falling victim to male abuse. This is precisely the native cultural

⁵⁷⁵ Indeed, these two subjects provide central, recurrent themes for the traditional ballad corpus of the British Islands. See Deborah Symonds, *Weep not for me: women, ballads and infanticide in early modern Scotland* (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997).

discourse that legitimates the barbarity of both Margaret's immediate ostracisation and incarceration and wider communal acquiescence in this process. The explanatory analysis *Magdalene Sisters* offers for the existence of the Laundry system in Ireland is, therefore, one that stresses the material reactionary effects pertaining to range of prescriptive models of femininity. Vitally, such models are presented as independently generated within distinctive Irish and American national cultures at different historical periods and across a range of creative media.

Read in this manner, *The Magdalene Sisters* both reiterates and (hopefully) justifies the central analytic method applied to and conclusions drawn about 1990s Scottish cinema in the present work. The key problem this film concerns itself with, one that should preoccupy criticism of contemporary Scottish cinema, is not the spectre of a small national film culture defenceless before successive waves of ideological colonisation. Rather, the problem is that of local critical orthodoxies which conceive the domestic impact and potential of cultural identities and traditions from other places in wholly reductive terms, as innately, unqualifiedly 'progressive' or 'regressive' entities. These quickly become arranged into a rigidly programmatic hierarchy of inclusion and exclusion policing the construction of idealised and increasingly monoaccultural prescriptive models of national film cultures and identities. After all, Sr Bridget's compromised status is signaled in *The Magdalene Sisters* not through her enthusiastic indigenous interpellation by an essentially reactionary American cinematic apparatus, but rather by her active desire to engage with this particular form of cultural difference (and, indeed, with all others) in Manichean terms, deified, as with *The Bells of St Mary's*, or

demonised, as with every Western produced since the advent of sound, “gone the way of the Devil like so much of the modern world”. Nothing is left in-between. Critical approaches to the contemporary Scottish cinema of which *The Magdalene Sisters* forms a distinguished part should avoid constructing a methodological analogue of Bridget’s binaristic worldview. That is just what this thesis has tried to do. There is limited mileage in proposing an unavoidable, definitive choice between ‘convent’ and ‘cowboys’, European indigeneity and American ubiquity, for Scottish film culture. Identifying the most commercially productive and culturally progressive external national filmmaking models, local adaptations of which will further nurture Scotland’s nascent national cinema is too important and complex a task for such analytical indulgences. Both *Magdalene Sisters* and the discussion of the 1990s set out in this thesis show that an emergent Scottish cinema cannot be necessarily, entirely or ideally reduced to a set of self-consciously corrective local responses against traditional and/or contemporary transatlantic cinematic influences active in the domestic sphere.

The Scottish cinematic achievement of the 1990s was not unproblematic, industrially or ideologically speaking. Yet taken as a whole it proved progressive on both counts, to an unprecedented degree. As this thesis has indicated, the legacy of the ’90s for academic criticism involves a challenge to rethink many traditional intellectual strictures regarding Scottish cinema’s ideal future, and its function as a distinctive sector within the national culture as a whole. In the wake of the advances witnessed over the last fifteen years or so, a still-prevalent *absolute* disdain for, and despair about, the pervasion of US influence within Scottish film culture appears a discredited, because fundamentally self-defeating,

vision of the national cinema's eternally and unchangingly 'subjugate' past and present. By contrast, as I have argued here, what the 1990s witnessed was an enterprising, self-confident local renegotiation of traditional relations of power between historically core and peripheral national film cultures. Despite the disappointments and missed opportunities of the 1990s, representative films of the decade like *Ratcatcher*, *Shallow Grave*, *Trainspotting* and others concentrate minds and energies on an encouraging prospect, the pleasures of charting and critiquing an industrially sustainable, culturally sustaining Scottish cinema which is at last as much a material actuality as it is tantalising possibility.

Filmography

16 Years of Alcohol (Richard Jobson, GB, 2003)
A Woman in Winter (Richard Jobson, GB, 2005)
Acid House, The (Paul McGuigan, GB, 1998)
Ae Fond Kiss (GB/Bel/Ger/It/Sp, 2004)
American Graffiti (George Lucas, USA, 1973)
Another Time, Another Place (Michael Radford, GB, 1983)
Beautiful Creatures (Bill Eagles, GB, 2000)
Bells of St Mary's, The (Leo McCarey, USA, 1945)
Big Man, The (David Leland, GB, 1990)
Big Tease, The (Kevin Allen, GB/USA, 1999)
Blind Flight (John Furse, GB/Ire, 2003)
Blue Black Permanent (Margaret Tait, GB, 1993)
Braveheart (Mel Gibson, USA, 1995)
Bread and Roses (Ken Loach, Gb/Fr/Ger/It/Switz, 2000)
Breakfast Club, The (John Hughes, USA, 1984)
Breaking the Waves (Lars von Trier, Dk/Swe/Fr/Nl/Nor, 1996)
Brigadoon (Vincente Minnelli, USA, 1954)
Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid (George Roy Hill, USA, 1969)
Carla's Song (Ken Loach, GB/Ger/Sp, 1997)
Charlotte Gray (Gillian Armstrong, GB/Aus/Ger, 2001)
Childhood Trilogy (Bill Douglas, GB, 1972-1979)
Chinatown (Roman Polanski, USA, 1974)
Clerks (Kevin Smith, USA, 1994)
Close (Peter Mullan, GB, 1994)
Comfort and Joy (Bill Forsyth, GB, 1984)
Complicity (Gavin Millar, GB, 2000)
Conquest of the South Pole (Gillies Mackinnon, GB, 1990)
Crying Game, The (Neil Jordan, GB, 1992)
Daybreak (Bernard Rudden, GB, 2000)
Dazed and Confused (Richard Linklater, USA, 1993)
Debt Collector, The (Anthony Neilson, GB, 1999)
Diner (Barry Levinson, USA, 1982)
Duel (Steven Spielberg, USA, 1971)
Every Picture Tells A Story (James Scott, GB, 1984)
Franz Kafka's It's a Wonderful Life (Peter Capaldi, GB, 1993)
Fridge (Peter Mullan, GB, 1995)
Four Weddings and a Funeral (Mike Newell, GB, 1994)
Gas Attack (Kenny Glenaan, GB, 2001)
Girl in the Picture, The (Cary Parker, GB, 1985)
Godfather, The (Francis Ford Coppola, USA, 1972)
Good Day for the Bad Guys (Peter Mullan, GB, 1995)
Gregory's 2 Girls (Bill Forsyth, GB/Ger, 1999)
Gregory's Girl (Bill Forsyth, GB, 1981)
Hamlet (Franco Zeffirelli, USA/GB/Fr, 1990)

Hard Day's Night, A (Richard Lester, GB, 1964)
Heavenly Pursuits (Charles Gormley, GB, 1987)
Help! (Richard Lester, GB, 1965)
Hero (Barney Platts-Mills, GB, 1982)
House of Mirth (Terence Davies, GB/USA, 2000)
Ill Fares the Land (Bill Bryden, GB, 1982)
It's A Wonderful Life (Frank Capra, USA, 1946)
Ladybird, Ladybird (Ken Loach, GB, 1994)
Last Great Wilderness, The (David Mackenzie, GB/Den, 2002)
Late Night Shopping (Saul Metzstein, GB/Ger, 2001)
Life of Stuff, The (Simon Donald, GB, 1997)
Living Apart Together (Charles Gormley, GB, 1983),
Local Hero (Bill Forsyth, GB, 1983)
Loch Ness (John Henderson, USA, 1995)
Magdalene Sisters, The (Peter Mullan, GB/Ire, 2001)
Maggie, The (Alexander Mackendrick, GB, 1953)
Magnificent Seven, The (John Sturges, USA, 1960)
Mallrats (Richard Linklater, USA, 1995)
Mission Impossible (Brian De Palma, USA, 1996)
Morvern Callar (Lynne Ramsay, GB/Can, 2002)
Mouchette (Robert Bresson, Fr, 1966)
Mrs Brown (John Madden, GB, 1997)
My Life So Far (Hugh Hudson, GB/USA, 1999)
My Name is Joe (Ken Loach, Gb/Fr/Ger/It/Sp, 1998)
Naked (Mike Leigh, GB, 1993)
Near Room, The (David Hayman, GB, 1995)
On the Town (Gene Kelly/Stanley Donen, USA, 1949)
One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest (Milos Forman, USA, 1975)
One Life Stand (May Miles Thomas, GB, 2000)
Orphans (Peter Mullan, GB, 1999)
Play Me Something (Timothy Neat & John Berger, GB, 1989)
Prague (Ian Sellar, Fr/GB, 1992)
Ratcatcher (Lynne Ramsay, GB/Fr, 1999)
Red Road (Andrea Arnold, GB/Den, 2006)
Regeneration (Gillies Mackinnon, GB/Can, 1997)
Restless Natives (Michael Hoffmann, GB, 1985)
Rob Roy (Michael Caton-Jones, USA/GB, 1995)
Santa Claws (Saul Metzstein, GB, 1997)
Scotch Myths (Murray Grigor, GB, 1982)
Sense and Sensibility (Ang Lee, USA/GB, 1995)
Sense of Freedom, A (John Mackenzie, GB, 1980)
sex, lies and videotape (Steven Soderburgh, USA, 1989)
Shawshank Redemption, The (Frank Darabont, USA, 1994)
Silent Scream (David Hayman, GB, 1990)
Skagerrak (Søren Kragh-Jacobsen, Den/Swe/Gb/Sp/Ger/Fr/Swi, 2003)
Slab Boys, The (John Byrne, GB, 1997)

Slacker (Richard Linklater, USA, 1991)
Small Faces (Gillies Mackinnon, GB, 1996)
Soft Top, Hard Shoulder (Stefan Schwartz, GB, 1992)
Solid Air (May Miles Thomas, GB, 2003)
Stella Does Tricks (Coky Giedroyc, GB, 1998)
Strictly Sinatra (Peter Capaldi, GB/USA, 2001)
Sunset Boulevard (Billy Wilder, USA, 1950)
Sweet Sixteen (Ken Loach, Gb/Ger/Sp/Fr/It, 2002)
That Sinking Feeling (Bill Forsyth, GB, 1979)
Trainspotting (Danny Boyle, GB, 1996)
Twin Town (Kevin Allen, GB, 1997)
Ulzana's Raid (Robert Aldrich, USA, 1972)
Venus Peter (Ian Sellar, GB, 1989)
Wilbur Wants to Kill Himself (Lone Scherfig, Den/GB/Swe/Fr, 2002)
Winter Guest, The (Alan Rickman, GB/USA, 1997)
Yasmin (Kenny Glenaan, Ger/GB, 2004)
Young Adam (David Mackenzie, GB/Fr, 2003)

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